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OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

1UP™ NETWORK

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 108 (September 2006)

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EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

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AND PSP GAMES RATED

130+

GAMES YOU MUST HAVE FOR YOUR PS2, PSP, AND PS3

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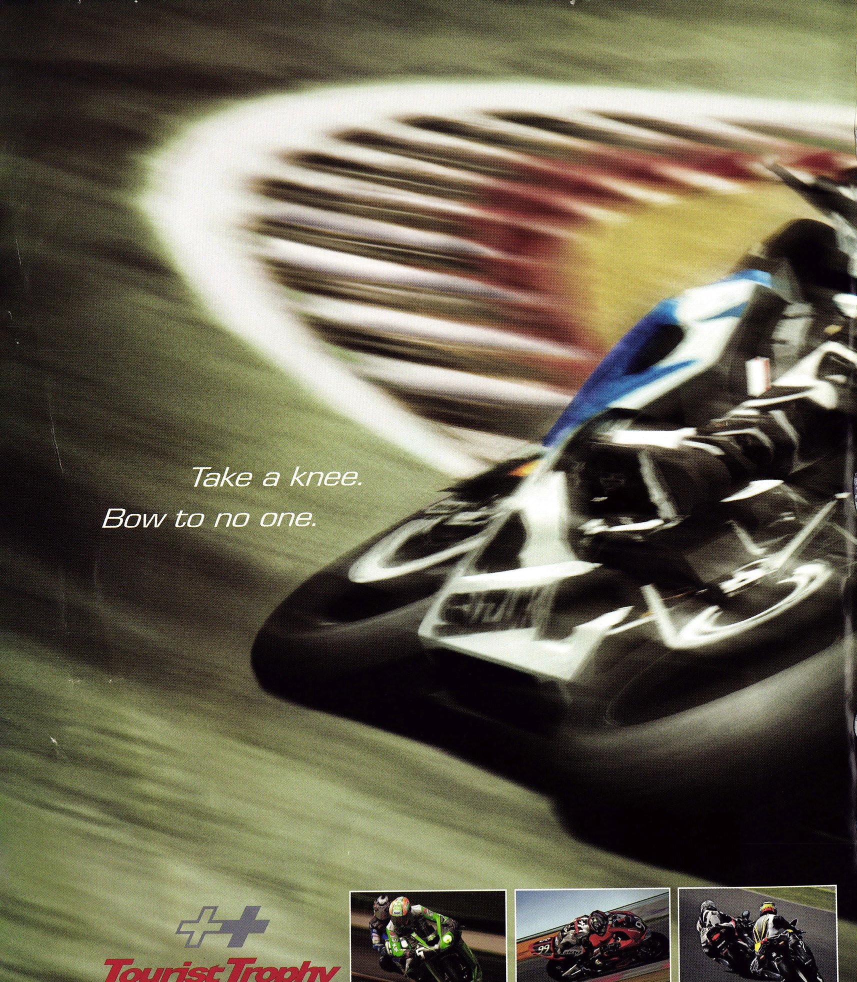
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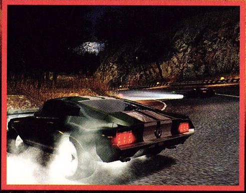

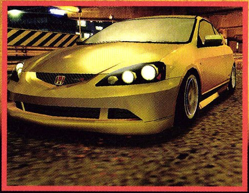

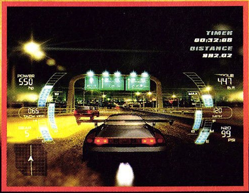
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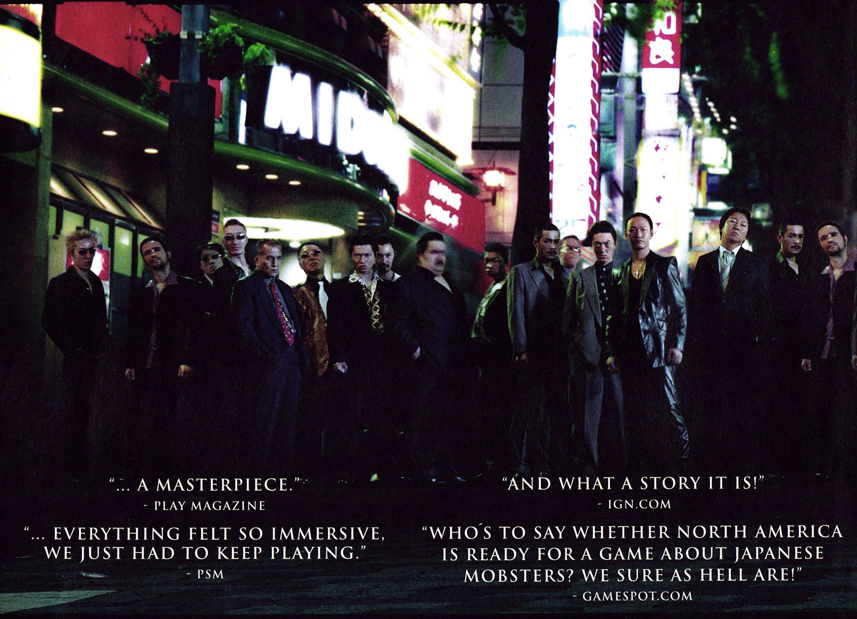

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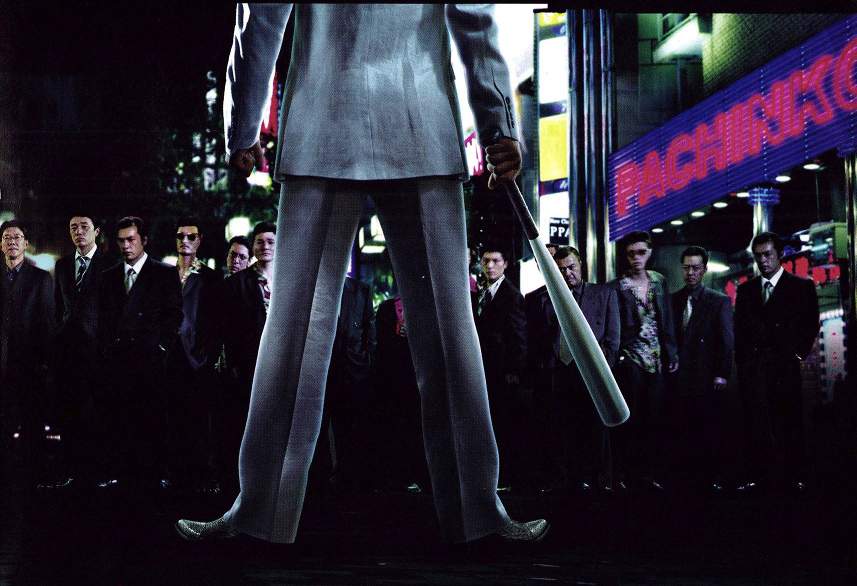

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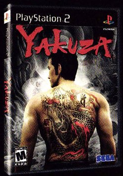

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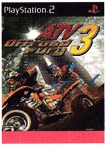
#108

OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE
ISSUE 108

PLAY IT!

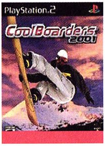
LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

Lego Star Wars returns with a blocky take on the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Sample a famous scene from *A New Hope* complete with bonus characters and codes to unlock in the full game.



ATV OFFROAD FURY 3

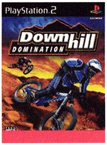
Tom counts *ATV Offroad Fury* as one of his favorite PS2 series. The solid open-world racing and rocking soundtrack contribute to hours of fun.



COOL BOARDERS

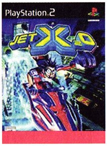
When not tackling the snowy slopes of Northern California, Alejandro could be found practicing his snow boardin' mad skillz from the comfort of his living room.

PLAY IT!



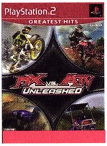
DOWNHILL DOMINATION

Logan learned that kicking your opponents out of the way while careening down a mountainside was not only appropriate but mandatory.



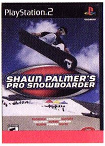
JET X2O

Joe always dreamt of becoming the king of the Jet Ski world, complete with a snazzy life jacket. Luckily he could get his adrenaline fix anytime without getting wet.



MX VS ATV UNLEASHED

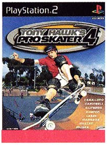
Dirt devil Giancarlo tore up more national parks with his dirt bike than uh, er,... did we just admit that here? Ignore us, Mr. Park Ranger.



SHAUN PALMER'S PRO SNOWBOARDER

Scooter found this demo under a pile of stuff on his desk and wondered, "Who on earth is this Shaun Palmer dude?" Find out here.

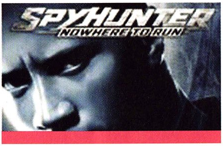
PLAY IT!



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

Dana stands by her claim that every PlayStation fan should have at least one *Tony Hawk* game in their collection. This one is in hers.

WATCH IT!



Check out movie-based games *SpyHunter: Nowhere to Run* and *The Fast and the Furious,* or sit back and go beyond this month's *Lego Star Wars II* demo to see what else is in store for you. We also showcase the epic *Yakuza*, highlight Crypto 137's return in *Destroy All Humans 2,* and go crazy with *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* (what is it with this fascination of monkeys in balls anyway?).

COMING NEXT MONTH!

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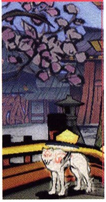

IS THE FORCE IN YOU?

One of the things we pride ourselves on is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That is one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month we ask you to travel with us to that galaxy far, far away and sample the highly anticipated sequel, *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy.*

You can also see what extreme sports games spent some time spinning in our PS2s and should be in yours, too. Why? Because playing hard and living dangerously is the *OPM* motto.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

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Marketing Team
Steve Williams, Eric Lempel, Jesse Caid
Executive Producer
Andrew House
QA
Sam Bradley, Edward Toomy
Account Coordinator
Justin Flores
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Lifelike Productions, Inc.
Lead Programmers William Bohan, Ron Midthun, Avery Lodato
3D Artists Jason Robinson, Philip Williamson, David Hayes
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Maimoona Block, Kirsten Costello, Christine DeNezza, Tom Gillan, Gerald Martin, Sean Thomas, Jim Williams

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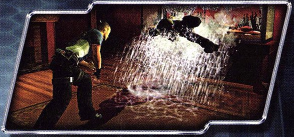
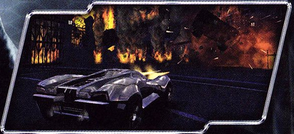
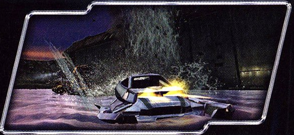


TAKE OUT ENEMIES USING "THE ROCK'S" WRESTLING-INSPIRED COMBAT MOVES.



EQUIPPED WITH AN ARSENAL OF WEAPONS, THE INTERCEPTOR IS LETHAL ON LAND OR WATER.



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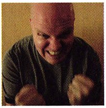
STAFF

THE OPM FAMILY

TOM BYRON got thrown in an awkward situation when Tom posed this question to Tom: "What the 'ell are you doing to *OPM*'s review scoring? Six issues ago you approved the switch from "blargs" to numbers, now, you've approved a 10-point system?!" "Yeah, but we'll be in line with *EGM* and 1UP.com," stammered Tom. "It's just keeping it all in the family! Besides, it allows for half points too!" Tom thought this through. "OK, sounds good, Tom. I'll give the rating system a 10/10; you I'll give a .5/10 and that's only because you look like Brian Cox."

DANA JONGEWAARD almost pulled out all of her hair during the production of this issue, and now that it's finally finished and out the door, she is fleeing the country for the third time in a month. Screw California—bring on the maple syrup, tea, and tequila!



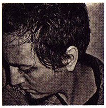
JOE RYBICKI is so very, very angry. He would explain the reason for his anger, but he would prefer that you just guess. Perhaps the frustration of not knowing will make you angry as well, and then he will have company. That would make him happy. But no less angry.

THIERRY NGUYEN has deactivated brain functions like sight, touch, taste, the memory of a melancholy youth, and his disdain for the existence of praying mantises, all to make room in his Scoot-Brain for the massive info-dump that is the fall games release list.

GIANCARLO VARANINI has tasted the sweet fruit of vacation, traveling over the Pacific to strange foreign lands where he ate delicious and unique treats, ranging from shaved ice to blue potatoes. Now to find an excuse to get back there as soon as possible...

LOGAN PARR may be sad that the *Star Wars* movies are now officially over but at least the story will live on in the world of games, including humorous takes such as the upcoming *Lego Star Wars II*, not to mention LucasArts' secret next-generation *Star Wars* project!

RYAN VULK finally took the big step of purchasing a vehicle (a zippy little Volkswagen Golf) after four years of living car-less in San Francisco. Now if only he could find a way to keep his dog from throwing up orange chunky vomit all over the backseat. Stupid Vito.

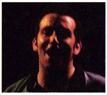


ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA has had to learn to live with the knowledge that he and his beloved Argentinian soccer team, who failed to even make the finals of the World Cup, are far inferior to the might of Giancarlo and the Italians. Forza azzurri, sucker!

EXTENDED FAMILY

JAMES MIELKE shares with the world his disturbingly extensive knowledge of Japan's bizarro world of pop culture as the writer of J-Town. We're a-scared. No, really.

milkman.1UP.com

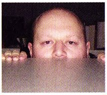


PATRICK JOYNT likes playing soccer games, but not as much as he likes downing a dozen Coronas, watching World Cup action, and crying like a baby when his team loses.

halofire.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.

robertashley.1UP.com



GREG SEWART hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.

stewy.1UP.com

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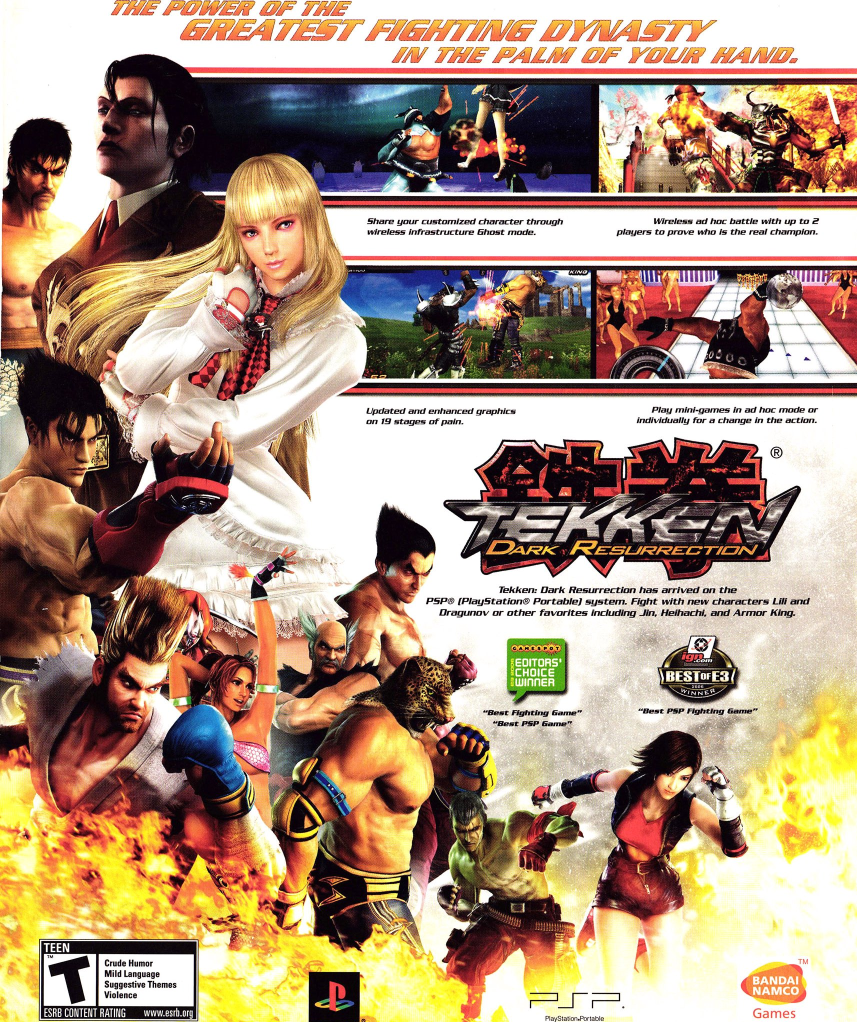

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PSP
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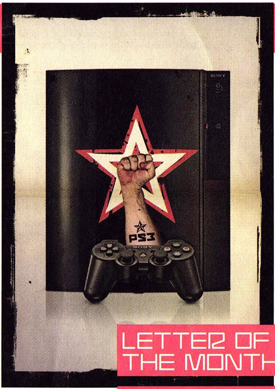
INPUT

WE WISH OUR READERS RAN THE INDUSTRY



LETTER OF THE MONTH

SONY FAITHFUL, RISE UP! VICTORY IS OURS!

After reading the July issue (*OPM* #106), I became concerned by the amount of dissent and skepticism found in both the articles and reader mail. I work for a game store, and as the lone advocate of Sony's products, I continually defend the PS3 (as I've had to with the PS2) against the "Microserfs." Here are just a few points to rally us back together and bolster us for the continuance of the console wars.

1. Don't let anyone tell you 1080p isn't important. How long have we defended the great library of PS2 games against the Xboxers' only [selling point]: their system's better graphics? Why would these same people, all of a sudden, abandon their prior logic and say that the graphical difference is negligible? Now we have the games and the graphics.

2. Free online gaming. This is huge. When the PS3 is released, 360 owners will be paying for their second year of service with Xbox Live. That means they've spent an additional $140 on top of the initial $400. After a year of enjoying free online gaming with my PS3 (having spent only $600), the Xboxers will have surpassed that amount with their third year of service (a total of $610).

That's enough for now—do not lose faith. WE ARE WINNING!!!!!!

Brian
via e-mail

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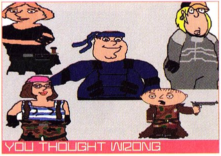


YOU THOUGHT WRONG

I'm an admitted Microsoft Paint addict and thought you all would like to see my mishmash *Family Guy* and *Metal Gear Solid* casts.

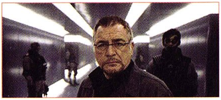
Will Eslinger
via e-mail

AW, SHUCKS!

I love the radiOPM podcast, and I think it's really entertaining to listen to. I first found it when I was searching for podcasts to play on my recently purchased PSP, and it was definitely a pleasant surprise. I have subscribed to *OPM* for over two-and-a-half years, and I always enjoy reading (and playing) it. I think you all are doing a great job. I just thought you'd like some positive feedback about the show and the magazine! You all keep doing what you're doing, and I'll keep reading, listening, watching, and playing. Thank you!

Chris Stone
via e-mail

Thanks for the nice words, Chris. We are good, aren't we? Note to everyone else: Chris speaks the truth: RadiOPM is the official podcast of OPM, and each week offers fun, information and insight from your favorite magazine editors. Your always-free download begins at radiopm.1up.com.



HEY, IT'S BETTER THAN DREW CAREY

I just wanted to point out that in Tom Byron's picture in the OPM Family section of Issue #106, he shares a striking resemblance to the *X2: X-Men United* character William Stryker, played by the great Brian Cox.

Paul McLoughlin
via e-mail

IF YOU RAN THE INDUSTRY

In the July issue (OPM #106), we ran a piece in Replay entitled "If We Ran the Industry," in which we editors give our opinions of just some of the things that should be fixed about the videogaming biz. We received a flood of response to that article, mostly in the form of your own ideas about what should be done. Here are just a few suggestions you kicked around....

HAVE DECENT VOICE ACTING AND CHARACTERS THAT WE CARE ABOUT

If we have so many Oscar-winning actors and movies, then why in the name of Sam Fisher don't game plots feel at all engaging? The only reason I watch cut-scenes is when I think I might miss something important or when I want to see a difficult boss die.

Typically, a game's characters and story are anything but engaging. The characters have no facial distinction, terrible voice acting or annoying voices, and irritating catchphrases.

If I ran the industry, games would have plots and characters like...like the Sly Cooper games! They have very good characters, good voices, and good stories!

Sheesh. Please come up with a more creative idea than the mindless dreck I see in most of the games today. And here's a hint—just because your game has amazing graphics and character rendering doesn't mean that's as far as you should go.

Lost_potato
via e-mail

START NEXT GEN SOONER

Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo would get started on their next-next generation consoles—PS4, Xbox 720, Nintendo Wii Wii—right now. If they got started sooner, they would have enough consoles ready day one—no shortages—and give developers more than enough time to make great first-wave games.

Steven Dillard
via e-mail

A SEVEN-POINT PLAN

1. Lengthen the life of a system: Most developers release many fine games near the middle/end of a machine's life cycle, as their teams learn to use the tools more efficiently and are able to push the limit even more. Eight to 10 years seem good to me. And with an investment of anywhere from $200 to $600, people want to get the most out of their machines.

2. Nurture your in-house talent: Developers have highly skilled and trained teams of programmers and designers, yet they seem to have no qualms about burning them out quickly. The long hours take their toll. Maybe with longer development cycles, these people could have more balanced lives and a more passionate outlook toward their craft.

3. Care a little/respect the customer: It's unforgivable for studios to release games with very little testing, marring products that had the potential to be fun. And with the proliferation of microtransactions and streaming advertising, the companies are showing their true colors: "We don't care about you. We just want your money, so pay up." Gamers aren't stupid. They look at companies the way they look at people: They'd rather be loyal to someone they can trust and who'll treat them well.

4. Understand the busy-adult lifestyle: Not everyone has time or the patience to spend an hour in a confusing maze, die, then restart the last save point. Adults are busy with school, work, families, and social life. How about making most games have the ability to save anywhere/anytime or have more frequent saves?

5. Shut up and listen: Listen to customers once in awhile. Why? Because they'll tell you what they want. And if you give them what they want, they might give you . . . money. Mostly, they want good, fun games. Sounds basic, right?

6. Support great games: So many good games flounder. When I talk to friends and family, they all rave about games like Ico and *Psychonauts*. Are we just more sophisticated? Probably not, but from word of mouth and reading magazines and gaming sites, we've learned about these great games. But without knowing anything about them, maybe I wouldn't have tried them. Showing the world how great and intelligent games can be would only help the industry.

7. Encourage rental outlets to carry more niche titles and a wider selection of games: Some people are wary of paying $50 for a game they have never tried, but they can't find said game at a certain large-chain rental store. So, they may opt to buy it used (in which case, the publisher and developer won't make any money) rather than risk buying blind, especially if it's a more unusual game. Or, they may wait until it gets cheaper. Maybe the publishers can make a deal with these rental companies about carrying a more diverse selection. And if the games are worthy, the publishers will probably get another paying customer.

Miki Lindsey
via e-mail

NO LOAD TIMES

Given the raw horsepower in the next-generation systems, I would have developers work on no loading times. I will be very disappointed if developers continue to have loading times in their next-gen games, especially with hard drives present (at least in the PS3, anyway). There really is no reason to have loading times anymore, and there's nothing that takes one out of the gaming experience than to have "Loading..." pop up.

JD
via e-mail

POLITICIANS WOULD STAY OUT OF GAMES

Politicians would stick to politics instead of jamming their noses into the gaming world. There have been too many politicians that think there should be a new amendment to the Constitution outlawing M-rated games.

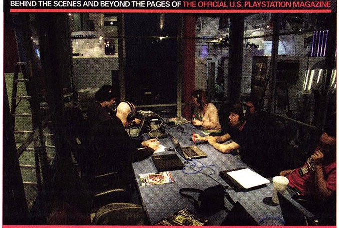
Edgar Linan
via e-mail

STOP, PLEASE, FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THAT IS HOLY!

Again, thanks to all the alert readers who noted that our review of *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja* in the July issue (*OPM* #106) was adorned with the incorrect screenshot. But, please—you can stop alerting us now. Please.

RADIOPM

BEHIND THE SCENES AND BEYOND THE PAGES OF THE OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE



RADIOPM IS ON THE AIR!

radiopm.1up.com

What's letter-writer Chris Stone all excited about? RadiOPM, of course! Join the cast and crew of your favorite PlayStation magazine (uh, that's *OPM*) as they wax and wane on the issues and games that affect your PlayStation gaming. Recent episodes discussed Sony's controversial PSP ad campaign in the Netherlands, episodic gaming, e-distribution, hints and tips on getting into the gaming industry, the over-the-top quirkiness of Clover Studios' God Hand, and reader questions. Download the wacky kids at RadiOPM every Thursday at radiopm.1UP.com.

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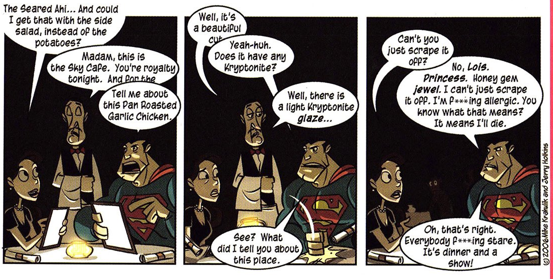
The Seared Ahi... And could I get that with the side salad, instead of the potatoes?
Madam, this is the Sky Cafe. You're royalty tonight. And for the
Tell me about this Pan Roasted Garlic Chicken.
Well, it's a beautiful cut
Yeah-huh. Does it have any Kryptonite?
Well, there is a light Kryptonite glaze...
See? What did I tell you about this place.
Can't you just scrape it off?
No, Lois. Princess. Honey gem jewel. I can't just scrape it off. I'm f***ing allergic. You know what that means? It means I'll die.
Oh, that's right. Everybody f***ing stare. It's dinner and a show!
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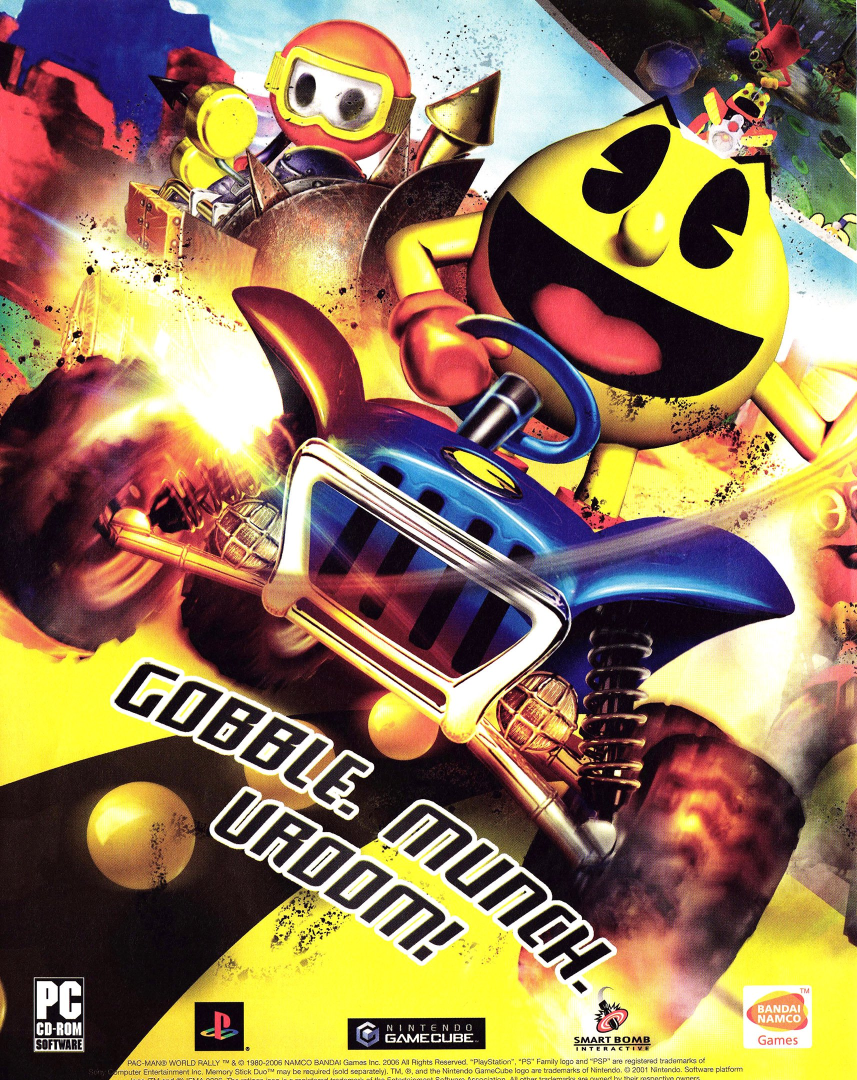
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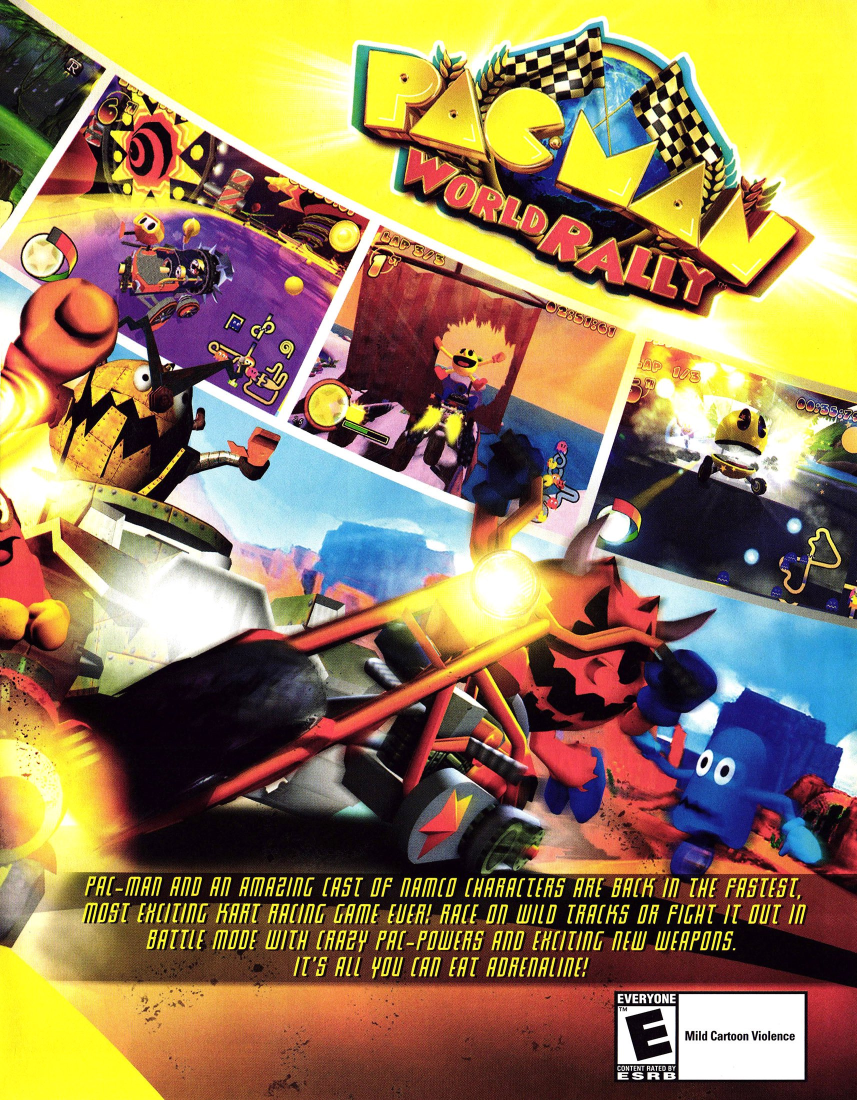
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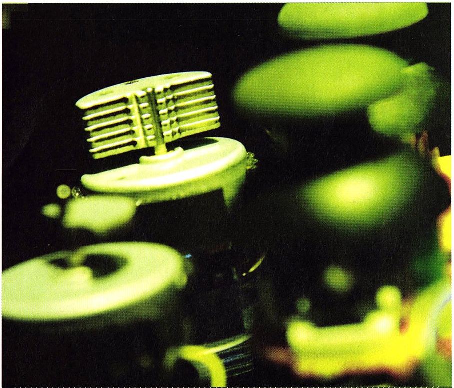

HYPE

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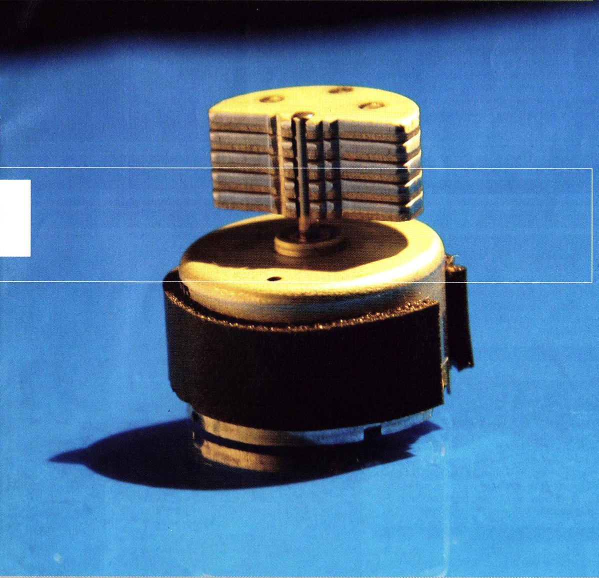
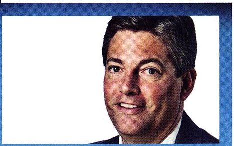
TOTAL IMMERSION

THE MAKERS OF THE RUMBLE SPEAK OUT

There's an old, hackneyed saying, "You don't really miss something until it's gone," and when the PlayStation 3 launches on November 17, a lot of people will be shocked—or not, as the case may be—to find that the experience of playing a game without a rumble feature might seem less fulfilling. Feeling the rattle of the controller while firing an automatic weapon or the little dings when scraping your car against a wall in a heated race—these things have become a natural extension of the gaming experience. But the PlayStation 3's controller won't be providing them. When that decision was revealed, Immersion president Vic Viegas was just one of the many surprised by the announcement. "The game community and game developers really expect [rumble] technology and they appreciate how it improves the realism of the game," says Viegas. "The PlayStation 3 stands as a symbol of technology, so to go backward [with the controller] really didn't seem to make much sense."

But, in a way, it makes perfect sense. Immersion's highly publicized lawsuit with Sony, in which Sony was charged with violating Immersion's patents for the force feedback technology in the DualShock controller, isn't resolved. Sony has since appealed the





THE SOLUTION?

There are a few possible ways that a deal could be brokered between Sony and Immersion. Here are two of the following, as explained by Immersion president Vic Viegas, pictured above.

OPTION 1:

"We settle with Sony and we make our tool available to all developers. Sony supports the technology in its own console and we work with all controller suppliers, first- and third-party, to [incorporate] the technology."

OPTION 2:

"If Sony were to share its communication protocol—its middleware capability—we could provide the tool [that enables developers to incorporate the new rumbling technology] to the game developer, source the actuators, and work with the third-party manufacturers to enable this next-generation technology. But if Sony doesn't want to include rumble in the experience, it just won't happen."

court's decision, which sided with Immersion, but there's no question that a bitter taste has been left behind. Sony is scrambling to create its own technology, despite its current reasons for not supporting rumble in the PlayStation 3 controller.

"I talked to our engineers [about] whether or not the supposed reason was accurate—if there was a conflict between the vibration and the motion sensor technology," says Viegas. "And in less than a full day of work, our engineers came back and had three solutions that could easily make the two technologies work side by side. And Nintendo has been able to make it work. Everything that I'm seeing and believing in terms of the gaming experience says that this is a big mistake. Why get rid of a feature that 80 to 90 percent of your gamers say is important to gameplay for a feature that isn't going to be supported in many games?"

For Sony, it's not as simple as reverse engineering Immersion's technology. If the company wants to come up with its own rumble technology, it's going to have to spend some serious R&D money to do so. "It's possible [that they could]," explains Viegas, "but with 600 patents or patents pending, it seems to me the more appropriate path or the safest path would be to work with Immersion."

Money shouldn't really factor into the equation, either. The funds Sony may potentially use to develop its own technology could also be used to work with Immersion and its teams. "We're quite reasonable," Viegas says. "We've made it clear that, even with next-generation gaming technology, we're not charging a premium for this. We have existing licenses with most third parties and we'd make those available at the same rate, so we're not trying to gouge the market or get rich off this. We're just trying to get paid for inventions our engineers made many years ago and that appears to be the sticking point with Sony."

Though, if you haven't been following the drama between Immersion and Sony closely, the fact that Microsoft once held stock in the company may also be an issue for Sony. Why, after all, would one console manufacturer want to pay royalties to another? Viegas insists that it shouldn't be an issue. "The result of our agreement with Microsoft would not obligate Sony to pay Microsoft," Viegas explains. "Upon a settlement with Sony, Immersion would be obligated to pay Microsoft a minimum of $15 million." Even if the money issue came down to something as simple as making the controller more expensive, yet again, Immersion says that it still shouldn't be an issue. "The implementation is actually equal to or less than the cost of the DualShock because we only use one actuator, versus the current solution, which uses two motors—the technology we're bringing to the marketplace would actually be cheaper."

That's a pretty attractive proposition. With the next-gen consoles, Immersion has essentially completed new technology that offers greater versatility.

> "WE'RE NOT CHARGING A PREMIUM FOR THIS."

In fact, there's such a broad range of effects available that if gamers had the opportunity to feel what it would be like to have them in a next-gen game, there would be even greater demand for them to be included. The good news is that there's still time, but for now it looks like Sony isn't backing down.

THE PERFECT LAUNCH

SAVE THOSE WASHINGTONS NOW, KIDS

While everyone has been making a huge deal about the PlayStation 3 costing $499 and $599 for the lower-tier and higher-tier models, respectively, everyone seems to be leaving out one key part of the equation. Oh, yeah, that's right: It's going to cost you a bit more than that if you want to actually play any games on launch day. That's because, unfortunately, games still cost money—and if the Xbox 360's pricing structure is any indication, they're going to cost a *lot* of money. So if we have to shell out beaucoup bucks at the launch window, what do we want to be getting for our money? Well, we're hoping it will be some of these games. Any of them would make opening the wallet a little less painful.

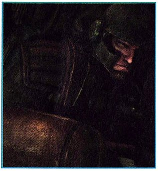
LAIR

WHAT IS IT?

Dragon-fighting and -flying simulator.

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD LAUNCH GAME?

If there's any single game that you want to show to your friends after you buy that cool new PlayStation 3, it'll more than likely be *Lair*. The guys and gals at Factor 5 know their stuff when it comes to hardware, and if any development team can use every bell and whistle that the PlayStation 3 has right off the bat, it'll be them. The only question is whether that technical knowledge will make the leap from X-wings to dragons.



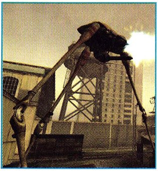
WARHAWK

WHAT IS IT?

A flight sim and ground combat game set in the *Warhawk* (PS1) universe.

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD LAUNCH GAME?

Simple. It's the only game currently known to make extensive use of the PlayStation 3 motion-sensing technology. As such, it's also one of those, "Hey, check out what the PlayStation 3 can do" games that you'll show your friends when they come over. It's just a shame that it won't be available right out the gate—because we're not sure that there's a better demonstration of what the controller can do than that in *Warhawk*.



HALF-LIFE 2

WHAT IS IT?

If you don't what this is, you need to turn in your gamer membership card.

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD LAUNCH GAME?

First-person shooters make for great launch games, and what better first-person launch game could there be than the highly praised *Half-Life 2*? We're a little curious as to how the port will turn out, but the turnaround time should give some insight into how well and how quickly PC games can be ported over to the PlayStation 3—though maybe that's not the best thing, since ports are generally frowned upon.

HEAVENLY SWORD

WHAT IS IT?

Goddess of War, by all accounts—expect some incredibly intense action.

WHAT MAKES IT A GOOD LAUNCH GAME?

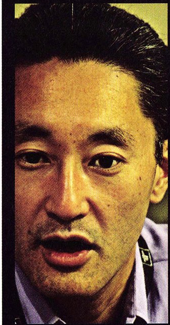
We all know the importance of having strong characters in a launch game—a character that's immediately identifiable with a given system. It worked for Master Chief and *Halo* on the original Xbox, and it could potentially work for Nariko in *Heavenly Sword*. The game has already generated a ton of buzz because of her and how the game looks (and ostensibly plays). Right now, it's shaping up to be one of the must-haves for the PlayStation 3.

PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

David Jaffe is one sad panda. In one of his latest blog entries, the director of the original *God of War* says that he's done making standard action-adventure games, essentially stating that there's no fun in them. It's time for someone to take an extended vacation.... While Mr. Jaffe may have a case of the Mondays, Sony is smiling at the fact that it's been rated as the top brand in an online survey conducted by Harris Interactive. Sony beat out Dell and even Coca-Cola. Delicious.... Even more delicious is news that Electronic Arts is trying its hand at another *Lord of the Rings* game---but this time, it'll be based on the books instead of the films, so you won't have to put up with Orlando Bloom's excellent "acting skills" any longer.... Lastly, as yet another devastating blow to the PSP's movie-playing capabilities, Target has announced that it will stop selling UMD movies in its stores, though it will continue to sell them online. |

OVERHEARD

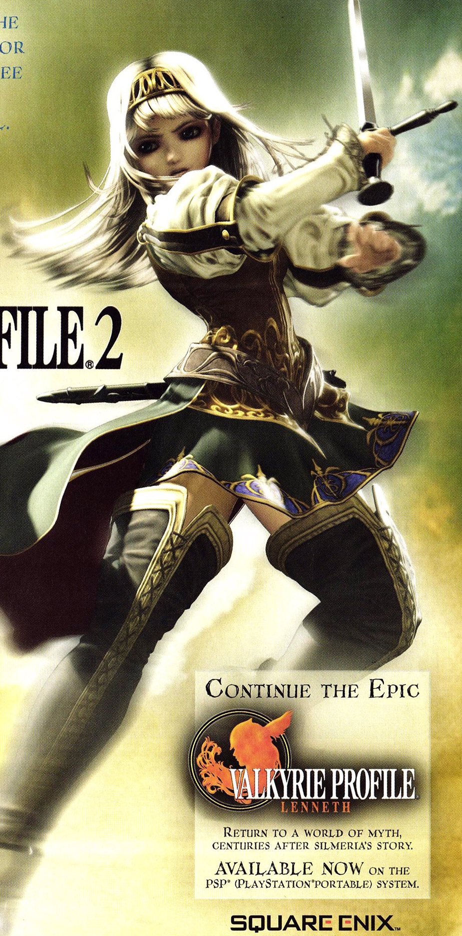


"The DualShock is a great piece of technology, but it is a passive reaction to what you're doing. This is an active input methodology, so if you ask, 'Which do you like more?' then I would say, 'Take out the vibration.'"

—Sony CEA president Kaz Hirai tells *OPM* about the decision to take the rumble feature out of the PlayStation 3 controller.

A REBEL SPIRIT,

THE GODS HAVE EXILED YOU TO THE MORTAL WORLD. WHEN THE WARRIOR WITHIN YOU AWAKES, YOU MUST FLEE THOSE WHO WOULD CONTROL BOTH YOUR BODY AND YOUR SOUL.



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- Suggestive Themes

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THE BIG PICTURE

BY JOHN SCALZI

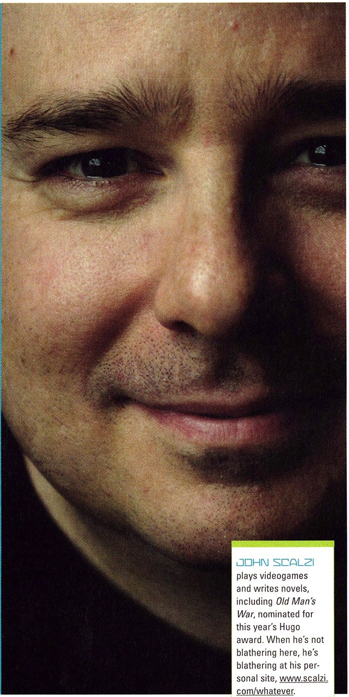

Photo: E. Hardesty

JOHN SCALZI plays videogames and writes novels, including *Old Man's War*, nominated for this year's Hugo award. When he's not blathering here, he's blathering at his personal site, www.scalzi.com/whatever.

EMPTY GESTURES

The more I look at videogames, the more I see the American flag.

This isn't a comment on the creeping infiltration of U.S. patriotic symbols into games—and even if it were, I'd be more worried about the creeping infiltration of product placement into games. (And I'm not. Here, have a refreshing Coke!) What I mean is this: Every time I see a politician barf up some rhetoric about how we need to protect our children from the horror of videogames, it's note for note the same sort of empty posturing we get when they debate a constitutional amendment against burning American flags.

The flag-burning vote is, of course, a hardy summertime perennial: Sometime between Flag Day and Independence Day, a vote is called in the U.S. Senate on endorsing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution barring the desecration of the U.S. flag. This is followed by a bunch of senators blathering on about how America's fighting young men and women don't deserve to see their flag disrespected, and how they're all for free expression, but the U.S. flag is different, and so on. They're followed from time to time by one of the more rational senators, who explains that if freedom of expression means anything, it means defending the right of speech—even for those whose speech you despise. Then it's time to vote, and while the vote is always close, the proposed amendment never passes, and it gets shelved until next year.

The amendment will never pass the Senate. It will never pass the Senate because its value lies not in protecting the flag but in allowing senators to wallow in cheap patriotic theatrics that they think look good back home. The vote is always close because senators on both sides of the aisle do the political math and let the relatively few senators who rely on principle cover their asses and ensure the amendment doesn't pass. It's the ultimate no-risk, all-benefit vote.

> PASSING UNCONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION DOESN'T ACTUALLY PROTECT ANY CHILD.

Now, on to videogames. There is an ever-expanding pile of case law that establishes that videogames constitute speech. And speech, as we all know (right? right?) is protected from government censorship by the U.S. Constitution. But this doesn't stop legislators at all levels of government from continuing to propose and pass laws attempting to regulate the sale of videogames—the states of Oklahoma, Minnesota, and Louisiana all recently passed laws along this line (and all are being sued by the Entertainment Software Association on First Amendment grounds). These laws are likely to meet the same fate in court as other, similarly constituted laws: They're going to get thrown out. It seems unlikely at this point that legislators don't already know this.

But just as the point of the flag-burning amendment is not to be passed but to allow senators to "look good" by voting for it, the point of passing videogame legislation is not to regulate videogames or to protect children but to let the legislator look good voting for it. It's something he or she can use back in the home district to say, "See, I was protecting your children!" But, in point of fact, passing patently unconstitutional legislation doesn't actually protect any child and doesn't solve any problem, save that legislator's problem of needing a quick "values" fix for the polls.

I don't burn American flags. I don't let my kid buy M-rated games, either. And I don't much like senators or legislators who waste time and tax dollars on empty gestures solely designed to make them look good. And here's what I do any time I see a senator or legislator who represents me perform such foolish behavior: I remember it the next time I vote. You should, too.

abovetheinfluence.com

STEREOTYPE

THAT WHOLE "EVERYONE'S DOING IT" THING
WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER
AND GETTING HIGH?
JUST ANOTHER STUPID STEREOTYPE.

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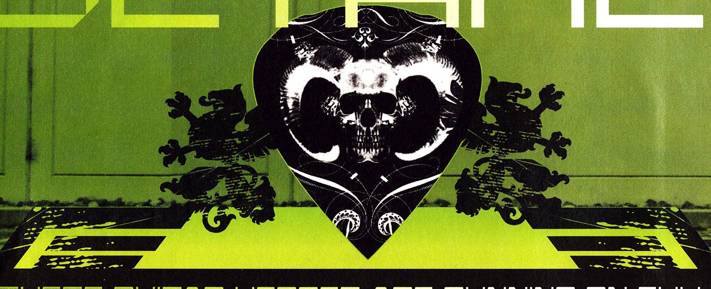
RED OCTANE



THESE GUITAR HEROES ARE RUNNING ON FULL

Who knew that a music game that uses a controller in the shape of an electric guitar could sell more than half a million copies, garner a mountain of critical acclaim, and get bought out by one of the world's biggest game publishers—all in less than a year? Apparently, only a little company in a quiet, nondescript office building in Sunnyvale, CA. While everyone else was taken by surprise at the success of *Guitar Hero,* developer/publisher RedOctane never had a doubt. With its sale to Activision earlier this year, RedOctane is running on full and making games.

A RENTERS' MARKET

With most independent developers, the path to starting their own company usually begins with a need to break free from the oppressive corporate beast.

For RedOctane, the path was a little different: Videogame rentals.

RedOctane's evolution from rental business to groundbreaking developer/publisher started in Taiwan. RedOctane cofounders and brothers Charles Huang, 36, and Kai Huang, 33, were born there but moved with their family to New York at a young age. After that, the Huangs settled in Northern California, where the two brothers ultimately graduated from UC Berkeley. Barely out of college when the dot-com frenzy hit, the brothers started an Internet company but sold it by 1999, just before the dot-com-bubble meltdown. It was time to do something new. "We liked playing games, and we thought, 'We should do something fun,'" says Charles. "That's when we thought of combining the Internet with videogames."

In September 1999 ("the same month that Sega launched the Dreamcast. We outlasted the Dreamcast," notes Charles with a laugh), the Huangs founded an Internet videogame-rental business they first called redgamezone.com, "red" being an acronym for "Revolutionary Entertainment Delivery." Charles remembers the early days: "We were renting a lot of games for the import market, mostly PS1 games." The name soon changed to RedOctane because, as Charles puts it, "Consoles were getting really powerful. They were like high-powered sports cars, the Ferraris. And the software was the fuel. That's where we got the 'Octane.'"

BUILDING A BETTER DANCEPAD

As RedOctane's rental business grew, the Huangs noticed patterns in what people rented. "We were seeing all this interest in music games," recalls Charles. "At that

STRIKING A HEROIC POSE
Guitar Hero executive producer John Tam (left) and RedOctane cofounder/COO Charles Huang (right).

RÉSUMÉ

- Guitar Hero (2005)
- In the Groove (2005)
- Afterburner Metal Pad (2005)
- In the Groove Pad (2005)
- Ignition Pad 3.0 (2004)
- Taiko Drum (2004)
- Reload Pedal (2004)
- Arcade Stick (2004)

time, *Dance Dance Revolution* was at its peak fever in Japan and other parts of Asia. And so there were people in the United States who wanted to rent those *DDR* games from us, but they couldn't get dancepads in the U.S. And we thought, 'OK, why don't we try to buy some pads and sell them to the people that want them?'"

They did that and made an immediate discovery. "A lot of the dancepads were really crappy—we'd sell them, and then like a week later, the customer would e-mail us back saying, 'Hey, my pad broke,'" says Charles. "And so we thought, 'OK, if there's a demand, maybe we can make a better dancepad." After a factory search in China (it helps that the Huangs speak fluent Mandarin and that many of RedOctane's 75 employees are conversant in it as well as other Chinese dialects) the company started manufacturing and selling dancepads in the U.S.

RedOctane's timing couldn't have been better. Around the same time the company began selling its own dancepads, Konami released the first *DDR* in the States. That's when sales for RedOctane's dancepads took off.

IN PERFECT HARMONIX

With the unexpected success of the dancepads—and expansion into other peripherals like the Reload Pedal for shooters like Namco's *Time Crisis* and the Taiko Drum set for *Taiko: Drum Master*—RedOctane set its sights on a bigger market as a software publisher while maintaining its hardware business, an unusual combination. "[At the time,] there were two major publishers that would touch hardware, Konami and Namco," explains Charles.

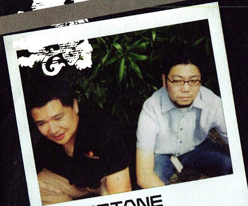
So now RedOctane had the big idea and the hardware experience, but it still needed the software. With good timing on its side, RedOctane found itself working with legendary Cambridge, MA-based developer Harmonix, creators of some of the greatest music-based game ever made. "Our first contact with Harmonix came through Sony," Charles remembers. "Sony had published [Harmonix's] first game, *Frequency*. So when [it] did *Amplitude*, a Sony music producer had an idea: 'Hey, maybe we can make a really cool peripheral to play this game.' We got together and brainstormed with Harmonix for a controller that we could make that would really improve the experience." The controller idea didn't pan out in the end, but the experience provided valuable contacts at Harmonix when the time came to make *Guitar Hero*.

John Tam, 36, is executive producer of the *Guitar Hero* line and other RedOctane products. A veteran of Activision and Capcom, Tam brought the needed software experience to the project. "We looked at all the ideas, and we brought together these: electric-guitar peripheral, rock-n-roll theme," says Tam. "Harmonix had always wanted to make a guitar-based game."

"A LOT OF DANCEPADS WERE CRAPPY. WE COULD DO BETTER."

HITTING THE RIGHT CHORDS

And so in early 2005, RedOctane began promoting *Guitar Hero* to...indifference. "We'd send product to the press and ask, 'Have you played this?,'" says Tam. "And they'd say, 'Well, this Christmas, we have 500 titles to review. I'll let you know when we get to it.' That's exactly what someone told us. And then they



REDOCTANE LIKES. . .

Charles Huang's and John Tam's non-RedOctane objects of admiration:

KISS

"Growing up, that was back in the heyday when it was about the theatrics of rock. I still have my

KISS 8-track. I don't have the 8-track player anymore, but I still have my KISS 8-track." —Huang

ERIC CLAPTON, THE CREAM VERSION

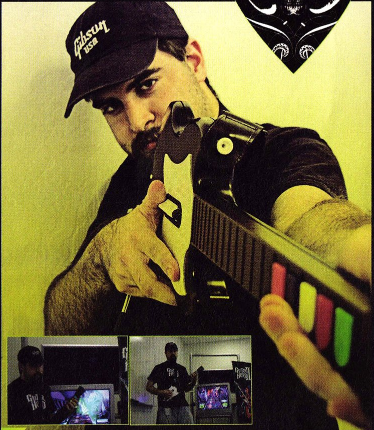
"We had a song from Cream in *Guitar Hero I* ["Crossroads"], and I think a lot of people didn't realize that was Eric Clapton, because it just says 'by Cream.' But there was a lot of early Clapton stuff that sounds fantastic." —Huang

VAN HALEN'S "PANAMA"

"Every time I listen to it, that is, to me, the epitome of a *Guitar Hero* song. " —Tam

ANGUS YOUNG

"Angus Young from AC/DC plays a Gibson SG. That's one of the cool things, I think, that brought us some credibility among people." —Huang



WORLD'S GREATEST GUITAR HERO

RedOctane lucked out in hiring Raul Renteria. He isn't just good at his job as the company's star quality-assurance tester—he's also quite possibly the best *Guitar Hero* player in the world. To prove this, Renteria played Rage Against the Machine's "Killing in the Name" on Expert with his back to the screen, racking up a near-perfect score. Renteria's highest score ever in the game came in around 500,000. His advice to would-be guitar heroes: "Practice, practice, practice. Lots of practice."

ROCK-N-ROLL SOUL

RedOctane found rock-n-roll soul in Marcus Henderson, lead guitar for the metal band Drist; one of their songs is unlockable in the original *Guitar Hero.* "For *Guitar Hero I*, all the unlocks were the original bands, and all the licensed tracks were rerecords," says John Tam. "We track them through WaveGroup Studio, an excellent sound studio in Fremont, CA. Marcus is one of the session guitarists. He does the heavier, hard-rock stuff, and then we have other session musicians do the more classic stuff."

played it and they called our brand manager back and said, 'Oh, my goodness!' They geeked out on them. It was totally out of control."

The stories that the two tell of *Guitar Hero*'s sudden success range from exciting to the downright bizarre: "We were demoing at the [San Francisco] Metreon last year, and there was this guy, I swear he looked like one of The Ramones, and he was playing 'I Wanna Be Sedated,'" Tam recalls. "And he had this daughter, about 4 years old. He was teaching her to head-bang. She could barely hold the guitar. He was like, 'Honey, no! You have to be like this, and you have to head-bang!'"

Even the famous have jumped on the *Guitar Hero* bandwagon. "We gave a private demo to Steven Spielberg and his son and Jeffrey Katzenberg at E3," Charles says. "Because Spielberg's son can clear all the *Guitar Hero I* songs on expert, he asked to see the *Guitar Hero II* demo. It was weird."

JAMMING WITH ACTIVISION, GIBSON

Charles Huang had to take out a second mortgage on his house to help bring *Guitar Hero* to store shelves back in November 2005. But the gamble paid off—by March 2006, he had negotiated his company's sale to Activision, one of the world's largest game publishers. But little has changed at RedOctane. "We still maintain creative control," says Charles.

And what of the licensing deal with Gibson? Didn't that ruffle the feathers of Fender fans? "We approached both companies, but Fender didn't understand," recalls Charles. "They said 'Videogames? What do we want to do with videogames?' They kind of told us, politely, to F off."

"Rumor has it that Fender had another deal in the works," offers Tam. "[Fender] turned [its] shoulder on us, didn't know who we were. Gibson caught the vision. [Gibson] also had more shapes. For us, it's all about the shapes and having different looks in the game and such, because we can't make them sound any different. Most musicians would say, 'Oh, I like the tone or strata of this.' For us, in the game language, it's more about the shapes and the history. The Gibson partnership makes a lot more sense."

The Gibson deal, and tagging "SG" on to the *Guitar Hero* controller name, brought considerable credibility among professional guitarists. "Angus Young from AC/DC plays [the Gibson SG]. That's one of the cool things, I think, that brought us credibility among people," says Charles. "When we took this to different shows, guitar players would see it and go, 'Hey, that looks like an SG.' And we'd tell them, 'Yeah, that's exactly what it was modeled after, the SG guitar.'" Adds Tam: "When they look in the game, they see SG, X-plorer, Flying V, Les Paul. They see all the Gibson names and they see the Gibson bios and stuff, [and] they know there is a Gibson deal in place. We have the ability to produce other shaped plastic guitars, so when we introduce them, we have a full catalog of shapes."

> "RUMOR HAS IT THAT FENDER HAD ANOTHER DEAL IN THE WORKS."

Looking forward, RedOctane will ship *Guitar Hero II* in November. Looking even further forward, we wonder if games could be created for an entire band, including drums, keyboards, bass—you name it. In answering this hypothetical question, Tam unwittingly hands OPM a world exclusive: "Yeah." ▮

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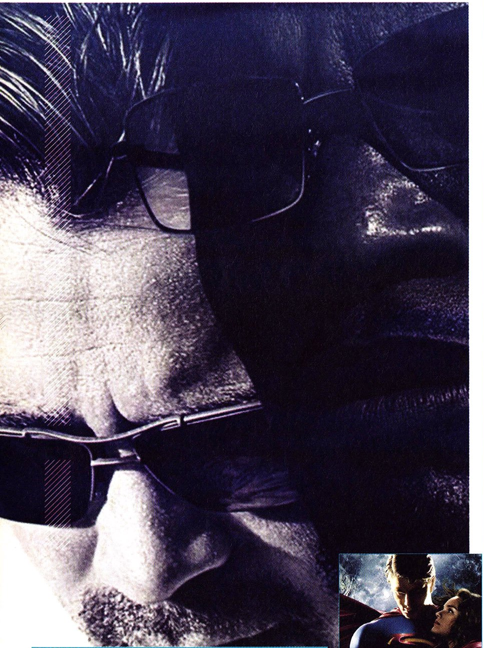
TRENDSPOTTER

THE LAST GREAT PLAYSTATION 2 GAMES!

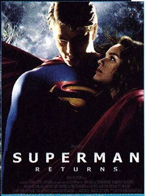
Yes, it's that dreaded M word. We all know that movie-based games generally don't do so well, but that's not going to stop publishers from trying to cash in on these money trains. Heck, some of them—with the exception of *The Da Vinci Code* since it's already out—may turn out to be pretty good...then again, maybe not.



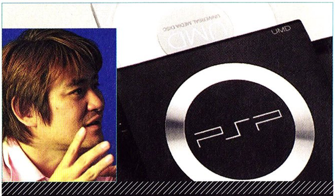
MIAMI VICE

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST

THE DA VINCI CODE



SUPERMAN RETURNS



WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

IT DOES MORE THAN PLAY GAMES

TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI
Chief creative officer of
Q Entertainment

GAMES
"*Lumines*. [smiles] Always."

MOVIES
"I don't really watch movies on UMD, but I do put the music videos for *Lumines II* in for testing purposes, like Chemical Brothers' 'Star Guitar.' "

MUSIC
"My favorite New World Order song is 'Regret,' which is why I'm including that in *Lumines II*."

WEB
"1UP.com---of course! Now are you going to pay me?" [smiles]

GAME ENVY

PREY

Do good things come to those who wait? In the case of *Prey*, the answer is a resounding yes. This first-person shooter for PC and Xbox 360 has been in development for 11 years—longer, if you can believe it, than *Duke Nukem Forever*, the most notorious videogame vaporware of all time.

But here we are in 2006, and—surprise, surprise—*Prey* is out and it does not suck. Developers Human Head took the original 1995 plot of a Native American battling aliens aboard a gigantic spaceship, and have crafted a gorgeous, challenging shooter, with some of the most innovative, clever level design you are likely to see this year.

Prey's surrealistic, Escher-like levels are wonders of disorientation (not since Descent has "up" been so hard to define, while the graphics (courtesy of Id's *Doom 3* engine) constantly keep you amazed.

So sure, they missed the original 1997 release date. But it's the best shooter of 2006 so far. So how about a PS3 port?

X kevin robinson
WOODWARD
WOODWARD
PlayStation 2
HOFFMAN BIKES
RIGHT GUARD
get Xtreme x get
POWER STRIPE
Stronger Fragrance!
RIGHT GUARD
XTREME
FRESH BLAST
INVISIBLE SOLID
ANTI-PERSPIRANT DEODORANT
NET WT. 2.6 OZ. (73g)

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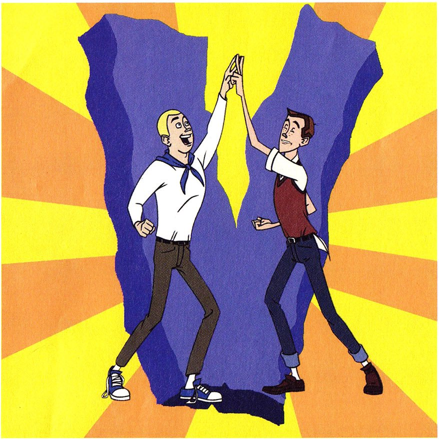
WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

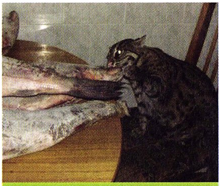


SEE

THE VENTURE BROS.

Cartoon Network

Any cartoon that can drop references to David Bowie's "Space Oddity," "scared straight" programs, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and *Jonny Quest* automatically piques our interest. But *The Venture Bros.* isn't just a series of pop-culture riffs blared out of poorly animated characters—there's a method to the show's madness. In watching the first-season DVD, you can see that there is, in fact, a real story arc with well-designed characters—not just a bunch of one-liners. When you're done with season one, check out season two, currently airing on Adult Swim.



ENORMOUS CAT

Russian people

Managing editor Dana Jongewaard stumbled upon this little treat—or should we say "big treat"—while surfing online. And it's not really a "treat" so much as it is an enormous cat that appears to have been spawned from the loins of a lion and a tabby—or something along those lines. Anyway, this cat's sheer girth entitles it to a number of privileges in its Russian home, the least of which entail hunting for catfish in the bathtub, followed by a delicious meal on the kitchen table—no, not "at" the kitchen table…*on* it. Check it out at jonh-devis.livejournal.com. Surely this cat will destroy us all.

FEEL

FIFA
APPROVED
First Division

SOCCER

FIFA

As the aftermath of the recent World Cup dies down, we'd like to take a moment to salute the athletes of one of the greatest sports out there. Soccer may not get a lot of respect in the U.S., but elsewhere around the globe, people live and breathe it. Even if you didn't get to watch any of this year's world championship, we encourage you to check out some games and learn what the rest of the world already knows: that soccer is a thrilling, tense, crazy, athletic sport.

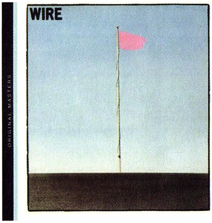
LIGHTSABERS

Jedi

It's going to be quite some time before we see real lightsabers—science has yet to master the technology behind a focused beam of energy that can cut anything. In the meantime, though, we suggest you check out one of these cool pretend lightsabers. No, they can't cut through anything, but they do light up, and…er…they…light up! And the craftsmanship is really good—second only to crazy knives from HSN. Pick them up at ThinkGeek.com.

LISTEN

H E R B E R T
S C A L E



SCALE

Matthew Herbert

If life were a movie, then Matthew Herbert's recent album, *Scale*, would be the soundtrack to a sunny Saturday afternoon when you're hanging out on your deck and having a beverage while waiting for a couple of friends to come over. This surprisingly happy and chill electronica album is the sort of music that can't help but raise your mood. Unless, of course, you love Hitler, in which case you're probably better off listening to something like, oh, the Pussycat Dolls.

PINK FLAG

Wire

This punk-rock classic is (OMG) 29 years old, but thanks to a brand-new remastered CD, it still sounds as fresh and exciting as ever. The debut album from a gangly bunch of British art-school nerds was a major leap forward for the then-new punk-rock genre: a perfectly sequenced "opera" of 21 songs, most just over a minute long. If you're into "indie" or "alternative" music and don't have this yet, fill this crucial gap in your collection right now.

Sugar...
and spice...
and everything nice...
RULE of ROSE™

RATING PENDING

RP

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PlayStation®2

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J-TOWN

THE PLAYERS' CLUB

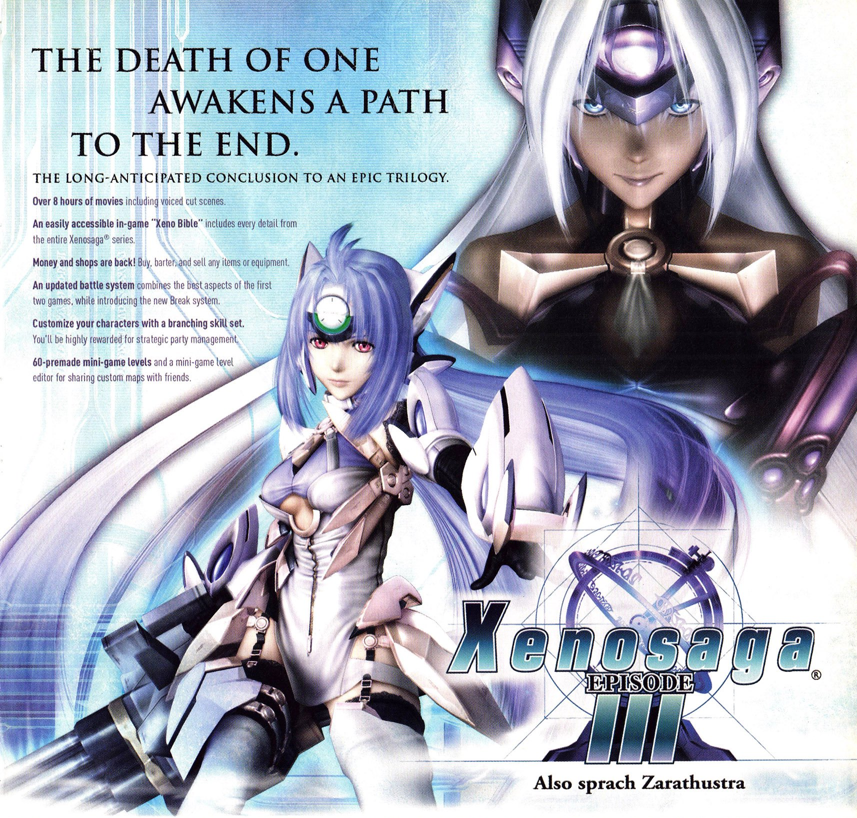
In a special twist of events this past month, your friendly neighborhood J-Town author got to spend six amazing days in—where else?—Tokyo. I was on assignment for a 1UP cover story about Q Entertainment, the development team behind your favorite PSP puzzle game, *Lumines*, as well as the upcoming *Lumines Plus* for the PlayStation 2, and *Lumines II*, *Every Extend Extra*, and *Gunpey*, all for the PSP. I've played every one of these games, and they're all great. And while you may not think much of a cheap-n-easy port of the original *Lumines* to your TV-friendly PS2, trust me when I say it's amazing to play on a big monitor and a kick-ass sound system.

But my reason for mentioning Q is not just to plug its upcoming roster of games. It's because my week in the Meguro, Shibuya, and Chiba parts of the Tokyo metropolitan area—where both 1UP cameraman Jason Bertrand and I spent every night going to clubs like LUXG, ageHa, Air, and the legendary Womb (with its unbelievable sound system)—immersed me in the club culture in ways I haven't experienced since I moved away from New York City six years ago.

The U.S., with the exception of the major cities like New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago, is pretty much a rock 'n' roll (classic, alt, indie, whatever) nation, with a healthy dose of country music. Not that there's anything wrong with that. If it moves you, then more power to ya. But club music—and I don't mean Top 40 house music you might hear on the radio, I mean *real* club music—as played by the DJs we interviewed, has a unifying power that must be experienced firsthand in order to be understood. No matter how loud you may crank your car stereo, it can't compare to the 5 billion watts of treble and bass you can get in the clubs. Nearly everyone we interviewed we also saw perform in Tokyo—people like USCUS, Shinichi Osawa (aka Mondo Grosso, the composer of "Shinin'" from the first *Lumines*), and TechRider, as well as the legendary DJs Tsuyoshi (aka Joujouka from the *Rez* soundtrack) and Ken Ishii (also from the *Rez* soundtrack). Like tribal leaders, they'd stand behind their respective altars, listening to the deafening cheers of the assembled masses. And as the treble gave way to the taut basslines and kick drums, each club would erupt in a near-euphoric explosion of clubgoers, all dancing in rhythm to the beat.

> CLUB-SAVVY GAMES LIKE REZ OR LUMINES MIGHT STILL BE SLIGHTLY AHEAD OF THE CURVE.

It's no wonder that Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vector-graphics rave shooter, *Rez* (a combination of a quantized synthesizer and *Space Harrier*) didn't fare well at the box office upon its release back in 2001. It was ahead of its time, by a lot. Most of North America is still indifferent to club music, apart from the occasional Top 40 club hit, so club-savvy games like *Rez*, or *Lumines*, or any of Q's upcoming games might still be slightly ahead of the curve. But I think we're catching up. Dancing to the beat of a drum, like we have since we were still living in caves—that primal instinct is in every one of us. The next time you play *Lumines*, pump it up. | *James Mielke*



THE DEATH OF ONE AWAKENS A PATH TO THE END.

THE LONG-ANTICIPATED CONCLUSION TO AN EPIC TRILOGY.

Over 8 hours of movies including voiced cut scenes.

An easily accessible in-game "Xeno Bible" includes every detail from the entire Xenosaga® series.

Money and shops are back! Buy, barter, and sell any items or equipment.

An updated battle system combines the best aspects of the first two games, while introducing the new Break system.

Customize your characters with a branching skill set. You'll be highly rewarded for strategic party management.

60-premade mini-game levels and a mini-game level editor for sharing custom maps with friends.

Also sprach Zarathustra

Wolf Fang
BOOST
53
53
REVENGE
Malicious Charge
E.S. Dinah HP 47059
E.S. Reuben HP 60430

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

PlayStation®2

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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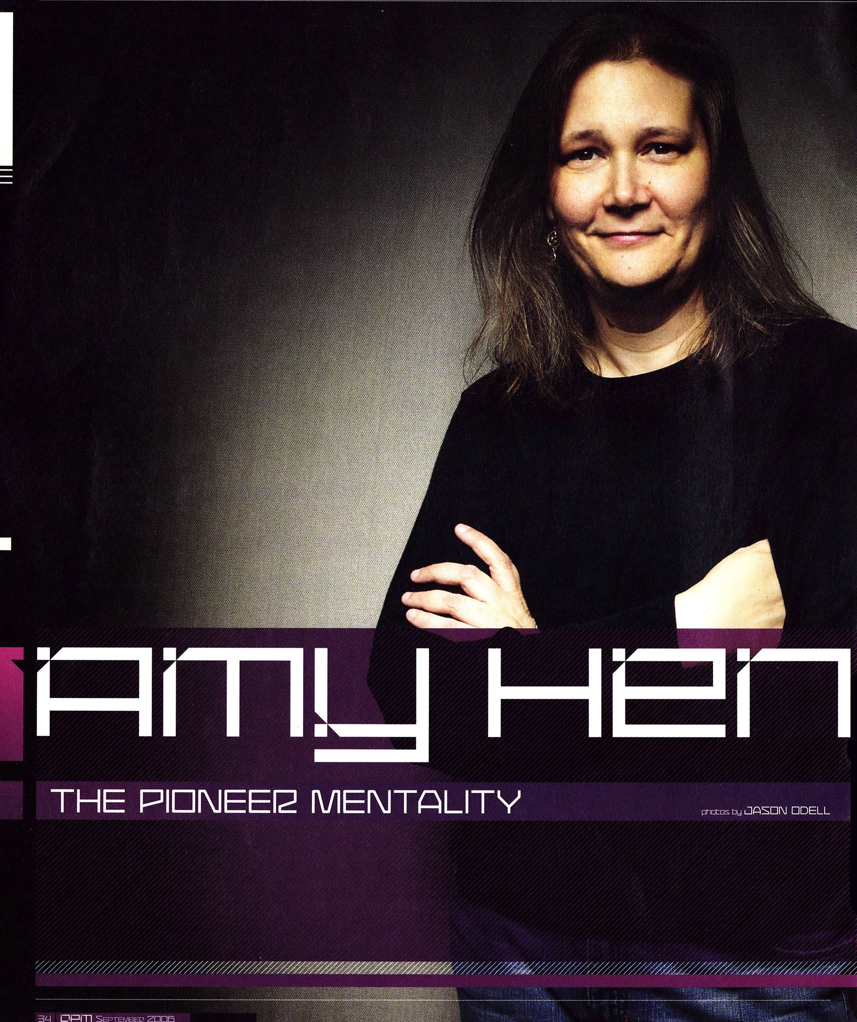


AMY HEN

THE PIONEER MENTALITY

photos by JASON ODELL

nig

To find someone who's been in the videogame industry for 17 years is rare. To find someone who's been in the videogame industry for 17 years, directed four or five critically acclaimed titles, and still manages to avoid the spotlight—well, that's damn near impossible. But Amy Hennig's soft-spoken, modest demeanor makes it easy to forget she was the driving force behind the intricate, epic, brutal story line of the *Legacy of Kain* series. Now, she's turning her formidable storytelling talents to the PS3, as a director on Naughty Dog's still-untitled project.

RÉSUMÉ

Michael Jordan: Chaos in the Windy City
(1994, SNES)

Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain
(1996, PS1)

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver
(1999, PS1)

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver 2
(2001, PS2)

Legacy of Kain: Defiance
(2003, PS2)

Jak 3
(2004, PS2)

Untitled Naughty Dog project
(2007, PS3)

OPM How did you get into this industry?

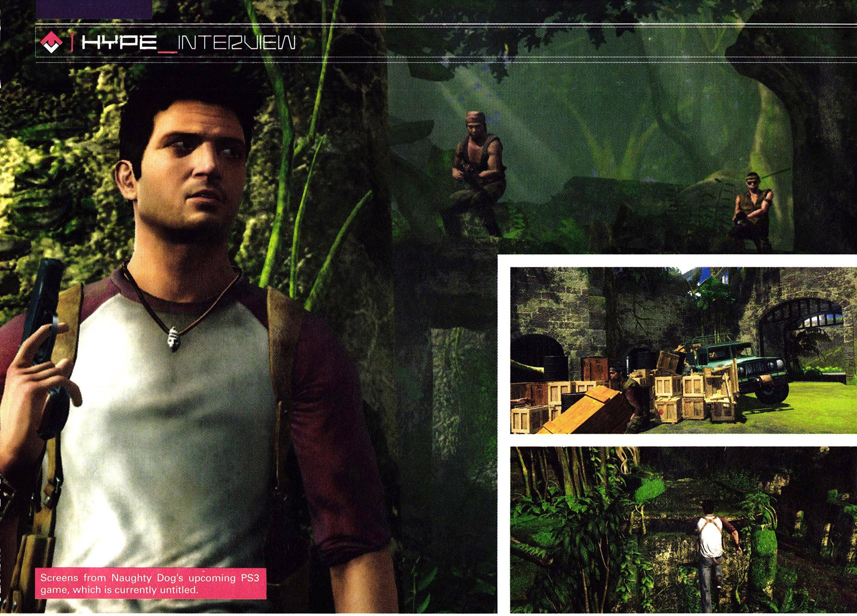
AMY HENNIG Well, it was pretty much a fluke. It was in late 1989. I was trying to make money to pay my way through graduate school and ran into an old friend who knew of an opportunity to do some art for an Atari 7800 game. I think a lightbulb went off, and I actually ended up dropping out of grad school and used the work that I did on that game as a portfolio to go into EA. That was in '91.

OPM What was the 7800 game that you worked on?

AH Well, unfortunately it never came out; it was finished, but we were at the tail end of the 7800's life cycle. At this point, I kinda had to relearn what the whole industry was about, so I would pore over these *Nintendo Power* magazines with a magnifying glass to see how they were using their three colors to do their characters. It was really interesting, actually. Ironically, despite all the constraints, I found it really inspiring.

OPM That's something that we've heard from a lot of different people, this idea that when graphics weren't such a big deal, the gameplay required more creativity.

AH Oh, absolutely. And the art required a lot more creativity. Just because you had to figure out how you were going to possibly make three colors look like the wall of a factory. It did give you that sort of pioneer mentality. You felt like you'd really conquered something when



Screens from Naughty Dog's upcoming PS3 game, which is currently untitled.

you pulled off the illusion of more graphical power than was there. But as far as gameplay goes—one of the challenges we face in this industry is that, as the graphical power of these machines goes up, it's very easy to spend all of your energy on just trying to meet [graphical] expectations. And it's really easy for gameplay to fall by the wayside.

| **OPM** The *Jak* series moved from a really lighthearted beginning to something a little more serious. What we saw of Naughty Dog's untitled PS3 game at E3 looked like it was a great deal more serious. Is that a conscious direction choice?
| **AH** It doesn't come across in a one-minute trailer, but one of the things we're trying not to do is—so many of the games you see these days seem like they're very dark, very serious, and very gritty. That seems to be the seduction for a lot of developers, just to say, "Look how photo-realistic our stuff is." Honestly, I think that's going to pass. The excitement about that simulacrum of reality is going to pass in favor of art. One of the things we're trying to do to distinguish our product from some of the other things we see people working on is to make sure that it's not so dark and gritty, that it's not taking itself so seriously. We've got our feet firmly planted in the pulp-adventure genre. There's a romantic veneer to that genre that I think a lot of games that we see out there now don't have.

| **OPM** You mentioned this unhealthy focus on photo-realism and on graphics in general. What would you say is the *biggest* problem with the videogame industry right now?
| **AH** Seventeen years ago, we couldn't have possibly imagined the world that we're in now when we were doing our three-color artwork and our three-frame walk animations. And it's mind-blowing to think [of] where we are now, when the team sizes haven't grown by the same exponential numbers. I think, at some point, our production model is going to have to start to change, because I think something's going to start snapping. How do we live up to the graphic potential of this hardware with the team sizes that we have now and still provide the experience that people expect for their dollar? And what does that do to the people on the teams—how burned-out do they get? It feels like our biggest challenge [is] that we don't lose our soul as game designers to the god of graphical realism.

> "SOUL REAVER SEEMS TO HAVE MEANT A LOT TO A LOT OF PEOPLE."

| **OPM** Do you think that an episodic digital-distribution model would be more beneficial?
| **AH** It certainly is a double-edged sword. One of the things that's exciting about the project that we're working on, given the fact that it's sitting in this sort of cliff-hanger adventure genre, is to think where it could go in the future. Instead of waiting two or more years for a game, people might be able to get installments every three months or every six months. I think that's exciting as a developer as well as a buyer of games, that it might be more of an ongoing relationship between the developer and the customer instead of this one-time event.

| **OPM** Is there a downside to that?

“IS HOLLYWOOD THE HEALTHIEST MODEL FOR US TO BE ASPIRING TO?”

AH The downside, I think, is: Who do you listen to? It's really seductive to want to go read the message boards and see what people think, but it's also really destructive if you're not careful. In an episodic model, it could be too tempting to read everything that your customers are saying and try to accommodate everyone. And then it's no longer this crystallized vision anymore. It's now something that [is] sort of diluted to make everyone happy.

OPM Well, how does that idea differ from the idea of doing focus groups?
AH Well, they can be really helpful; I guess the difference for me between a focus group, which is a limited event with strangers, and reading what your fans are saying about you online is that your level of emotional commitment to those people is different. You want to make [your fans] happy. Whereas with a focus group, it's data. Those people are in for a couple of hours and they're gone, and it's data that you can use or not use.

OPM Jason Rubin, one of the founders of Naughty Dog, said that we don't put enough of a spotlight on game designers. Who would you say are your heroes in terms of designers?
AH Tim Schafer's a big one. Just because I think he's always got such a unique vision. And obviously the guys who did *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*. And Miyamoto always tops the list, of course, and Will Wright's everyone's hero, so that just goes without saying. It's the people who have a vision and stick to it.

OPM Do you agree with Jason's premise? Should we have the kind of cult of personality for our designers that the movie industry has for its directors?
AH I don't know. I'm not sure how I feel about that. I worry a bit, because we can all think of examples of people who went from being really good game developers to kind of engaging in the cult of their own personality a little bit. That's a natural seduction, but I'd want to see more examples of people who kind of straddled that world well. Is Hollywood the healthiest model for us to want to be aspiring to? I don't think so. I think it's great we know who did the work and we admire them, but let's not distract them from doing the work.

OPM Finally, what game of all that you have worked on are you proudest of?
AH Despite its flaws, I think the one I have the fondest feelings for is the first *Soul Reaver*. Only because we were able to do so much of what we tried. And so much of it was so stupidly ballsy, you know? There were just about five of us on the team and we were like, “Oh yeah, we're going to write a streaming engine.” And, “Oh yeah, we're going to have two worlds and shift between them in real time on the screen.” And everybody's looking at us like we were just crazy. It's that kind of ambitious challenge that I think is so invigorating for a developer. Now, there's a lot of things that I wish had gone differently; obviously, I didn't want to cut off the end of my game, but you know, these choices aren't usually made by the design team. And so I have regrets that still kind of sting a little bit. But on the whole, I have a nice nostalgic feeling when I think about that game. And it seems to have meant a lot to a lot of people, in ways that I don't completely understand, so that makes it special.

BIG AIR

“My big secret, which I don't often share,” admits Hennig, “is that the first game I designed was the Michael Jordan SNES game. The concept was not mine; it was sort of handed to us on a platter. But we did things in that game that I wasn't seeing anybody else do at the time. I mean, obviously, it's Michael Jordan running around in a platform game; what are you gonna do, right? But it was actually a really formative experience as a designer.”

SEPTEMBER 06

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY

03

Dominic West, star of *OPM* fave *The Wire*, turns 37. We love you, McNulty—you're good police!

10

The truth has always been out there, but we didn't know it until ***The X-Files*** premiered 13 years ago tonight.

17

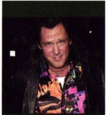
Practice up on your Elvish and quit shaving your feet, for it is **Tolkien Week.**

04

It's **Labor Day**—insert lame birthing joke here.

18

Wave farewell to two networks you never watched (UPN, the WB) and say hello to a new network you'll never watch as **The CW** launches.



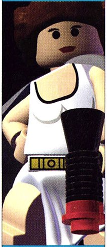
25

Two men who saved worlds—**Mark Hamill** and **Christopher Reeve**—were born today. Too bad they couldn't save us from fellow birthday boy **Michael Madsen.**

NEW GAMES

05

Okami, LocoRoco, Yakuza—it looks like the drought is finally over.



12

It's **Video Games Day,** so go buy ***Lego Star Wars II***!

19

Use this week's game allowance to buy a peg leg for **International Talk Like a Pirate Day.**

26

Hi, little friends: ***Scarface*** is out today.

NEW GAMES

06

We were going to celebrate **National Do It Day** right now, but we think we'll put it off till tomorrow.

13

How peachy! **Roald Dahl** was born 90 years ago. Suck on an everlasting gobstopper in his honor.

27

Want a picture of a dog dressed as a vampire? Thanks to Google's launch eight years ago today, you can have it.

07

Be they Belgian, cone-shaped, or in sandwich form, we salute all our treadmarked friends during this, **National Waffle Week.**

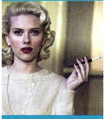
21

We know you love us—but even if you don't, you have to pretend to: It's **Be Kind to Editors & Writers Month.**

NEW FLICKS

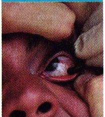
01

If you've ever cracked a red stapler joke, then get your butts out to see Mike Judge's new movie, ***Idiocracy.***



15

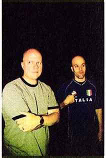
It's a dark day in theaters as ***Black Snake Moan*** (starring viper-lover Sam Jackson), and ***The Black Dahlia*** (with Scarlett Johansson) open.



22

Martin H. Fischer said, "A man may be born a jackass; but it is his business if he makes himself a double one." Oh, and ***Jackass: Number Two*** is out.

NEW FLICKS



09

Bald is Beautiful Days are officially today and tomorrow, but Giancarlo and Joe would like to point out that bald is beautiful every day.

16

Thirty percent of Munich's annual beer consumption takes place in the next two weeks as **Oktoberfest** begins...that's right, in September.

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MIDGAR DIED...

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PlayStation®2

TEEN
T®
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Mild Language
Use of Tobacco
Violence

SOMETHING SURVIVED...

THE WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY® VII IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE.

A mysterious organization has emerged from the wreckage of the Meteor disaster. The enigmatic Vincent Valentine may be the only one who can save this shattered world.

Set after the events in FINAL FANTASY VII and FINAL FANTASY VII ADVENT CHILDREN, this entirely new game features familiar characters, dazzling gunplay and shocking truths never before revealed!

DIRGE of CERBERUS™

FINAL FANTASY® VII

919/2060
18/18 572

Take on new enemies and dangers in dazzling 3D environments

Vincent: This ends here.
Leave him to me.

Stunning graphics and CG cinemas continuing the epic storyline

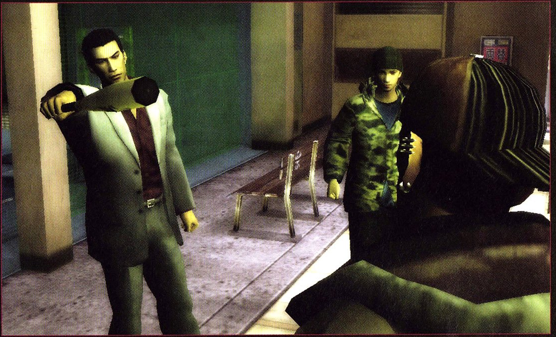
Meet familiar faces and unique allies in an all-new action adventure

GAME WAVE

THE GAMES OF FALL ROLL IN

Hear that? That is the sound of the PlayStation experience crashing onto your shelves in the coming months. With the companies pushing out PS2 heavy hitters, the PSP library growing ever-so-larger, and the launch of the PS3, this fall will bear witness to quite possibly the largest PlayStation deluge in history. With that in mind, we're going to help you navigate this more-than-90-days-of-game releases by charting which titles come out in which month (our lawyers insist that we tell you that this is a tentative list based on info given at press time, and game dates might shift or disappear altogether). Get ready to catch the wave.

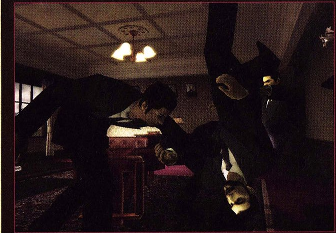
ILLUSTRATION: STUNT KID

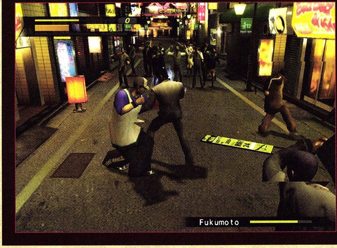


PUB. Sega **DEV.** Amusement Vision **PLATFORM** PS2

YAKUZA

EASTSIDE GANGSTER GOING WESTSIDE

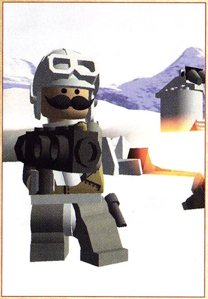




Many games focus on offering players a glimpse of another lifestyle—such as the life of a burly warrior in ancient times or a spunky kid in a fantasyland or a hardcore gangster in a fictionalized knock-off of Los Angeles. But this is the first game that puts you in the shoes of a member of the notorious yakuza. A feared member, at that—your first action in the game is to beat the crap out of some bankers who don't pay their protection fees.

Think of *Yakuza* as a harsher version of *Shenmue* or a *GTA* set in Tokyo. You have a main objective that continues the story, but you can wander around the city and do things like buy random (and real, such as Dekavita C energy drink!) goodies from stores and vending machines, hang out at hostess bars, or go for a round at the batting cages. But don't think the game is a wonderful romp filled with buying Banana Kit Kat bars—there's plenty of fisticuffs. You'll fight street toughs ranging from rival yakuza clan members to angry hobos.

Every time we play, we get a little more intrigued and even enthralled (especially by the story, which starts with a lot of yakuza-clan intrigue in 1995, then throws you into prison for 10 years, and picks up again in 2005 with a whole new, er, underworld). But we're also hoping that Sega tweaks the camera (which tends to focus on odd spots mostly during combat) before the game finishes its journey across the Pacific. Oh, and no matter how you spin it, hearing Michael Madsen's voice pop out of an evil-looking yakuza member's mouth is pretty weird.



PUB. LucasArts DEV. Traveller's Tales PLATFORM PS2, PSP

LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

LAUGH IT UP, FURBALL

The normally unremarkable Traveller's Tales (*Haven*) struck Alderaanian gold with last year's surprise hit *Lego Star Wars*. This fall, we may all be in for a treat bigger than the Millennium Falcon when LucasArts ships *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* day and date with the DVDs of the first three *Star Wars* films on September 12th. In a lighthearted, often hilarious action-adventure turn, *LSWII* will have you and your four-member rebel band saving your favorite far, far, away galaxy from the Evil Empire—only this time, you'll be doing it in *Episodes IV, V,* and *VI* with over 100 playable Lego characters (including those you create), tons of secret levels (stormtroopers in Jacuzzis!), and controllable, free-roaming vehicles. With the fate of entire species (Ewoks!) hanging in the balance, you'll want to block out plenty of time for this potential Lego gem.

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft PLATFORM PS3, PS2, PSP

OPEN SEASON

HUNTER, MEET HUNTED

Typically, we hold out slightly more than no hope for games based on animated films, but *Open Season* gives us reason to feel more optimistic. That's because Ubisoft Montreal, the studio that brought us *Splinter Cell* and *Prince of Persia*, is making it. These talented folks have been tasked with making a game out of the story of a grizzly bear and a deer trying to best the hunters who are after them. The result is a stealth game that equips you with weapons such as nut-shooting squirrels and "skunk bombs."

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Hand Co. PLATFORM PS2

ONE PIECE: PIRATES' CARNIVAL

RUM NOT INCLUDED

Yes, you've seen the *One Piece* brand on the PS2 before, but this time around, the game is different! (Well, for this franchise, at least.) *Pirates' Carnival* comes to you in the ever-beloved format of a minigame collection, and it features all the popular characters from the television series, of course. Chase treasure, wave pirate flags, wield thundering swords—all the fun of piratedom is right there for you and three of your closest (or even not-so-close) friends.

3/3
0/3
BOOST
Sword Fish
BREAK
105
TOTAL 105
483
41

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Monolith Soft PLATFORM PS2

XENOSAGA EPISODE III: ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

MECHS WHO ROLL WITH NIETZSCHE

It's a bummer that Namco Bandai chopped the series from six parts into three. It's tough to pare down something massive into something that's merely big. But at least we know that there's an ending in sight—and that we won't be left hanging when it comes to learning about the Gnostics and Vector Industries' involvement with them. Plus, the game looks like the best parts of *Episode I* and *II* fused into an überclimax!

PUB. D3 Publisher DEV. Sony CEI PLATFORM PSP

WTF

WE WORK HARD FOR THE MONEY

This Japanese collection of minigames (which came out as *Baito Hell 2000* in Japan) has been renamed for its North American debut. The acronym stands for *Work Time Fun*, and you'll be playing each minigame to earn money; said money allows you to unlock more of the game. Thankfully, instead of TPS reports, the games are focused on "tasks" like competing in belching contests. Hey—that sounds like our office!

WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPT...

September is simultaneously the seventh and ninth month of the year. Well, *septum* is Latin for "seven" and, in the Roman calendar, September was indeed the seventh month. Then, the Council of Trent decided that the original Julian (Roman to us) calendar was messing with the schedule too much, and changed over.

Pub. 2K Games Dev. Visual Concepts Platform PS3, PS2

NHL 2K7

The current-gen version looks like an incremental upgrade to *NHL 2K6*—it's when you check out the next-gen version that you notice the all-new skating-and-animation system.

Pub. 2K Games Dev. Visual Concepts Platform PS3, PS2

NBA 2K7

Visual Concepts ups the ante on its excellent *NBA 2K* series by adding streetball. Woooo, streetball! Sure, there's other stuff, but that pales in comparison to dribbling it up on the mean streets.

Pub. 2K Games Dev. Visual Concepts Platform PS3, PS2

COLLEGE HOOPS 2K7

We're of the mind-set that college ball is a whole lot more interesting than its professional counterpart. As a result, we're more inclined to play *College Hoops* than its NBA big brother. This is also a chance for us to relive our errant hoop dreams.

Pub. Atari Dev. Spike Platform PS2

DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI TENKAICHI GREATEST HITS

This Greatest Hits version only indicates a price drop, not an acknowledgement of the time you made Piccolo fold Buu's stomach in half with a single hit.

Pub. Buena Vista Dev. Monkey Bar Games Platform PS2

FLUSHED AWAY

It's the next Aardman Animation (*Wallace & Gromit*) movie, and, therefore, it has a game adaptation. You play as one of two rats zipping around Ratropolis, protecting it from a very bad amphibian named Toad.

Havoline
CHARGER

Pub. EA Sports Dev. EA Tiburon Platform PS2

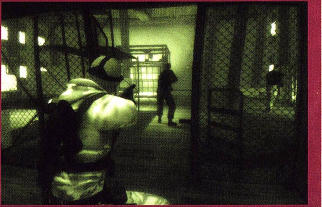
NASCAR 07

Jokes about turning left are passé. We're going to spice things up and joke about how, this time, you turn right. And then get lots of letters from irate NASCAR fans. Okay, real info: there's a new Momentum Meter that builds up from escaping danger (i.e. not getting hit by cars sideswiping you).

Pub. EA Sports Dev. EA Canada Platform PS2

NHL 07

We haven't heard much about this version of *NHL*, but we know that we loved how *NHL 96* was included in *NHL 06*, and hey, *NHL 07* is the 11th anniversary of *NHL 96*. So include it in again, EA!

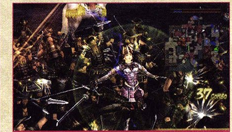


PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft Montreal PLATFORM PS2

SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

GOING NATIVE

What's the next step for Sam Fisher after stealthing it up three times before becoming stale? How about becoming a bad boy—sort of? In this next installment of *Splinter Cell*, Sam Fisher goes undercover with a terrorist cell and becomes a double agent for Third Echelon. That calls for the creation of the Trust Meter, a quantitative measurement of how much trust you have from both the National Security Agency and John Brown's Army (the organization you've infiltrated). As you perform actions (taking out authority figures or countering JBA objectives), the meter slides around—if it slides to the NSA side too much, you'll blow your cover. If it hovers in the JBA side, then you've gone native. This also presents interesting dilemmas, like when you need to protect a JBA member from an attack in prison—do you kill his attacker to earn his trust, or merely knock out the attacker in order for the NSA to interrogate him later (at the cost of your JBA contact's thinking you lack the necessary harshness of character to join the organization)? Didn't expect to deal with moral compromise in a *Splinter Cell* game, did you?

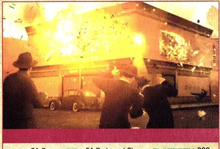


PUB. Koei DEV. Omega Force PLATFORM PS2

SAMURAI WARRIORS 2

DYNASTY WARRIORS SET IN JAPAN, AGAIN

The *Dynasty Warriors* hack-n-slash action formula, while overdone, always seems to work. *Samurai Warriors 2*, which again moves the *DW* franchise eastward to feudal Japan, introduces 10 new warriors (making 26 total) you can use for button-mashing battles with tons of enemies on huge playfields in story, free, and survival modes in both single-player and two-player cooperative. There's also sugoroku, based on an ancient Japanese board game.



PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Redwood Shores PLATFORM PSP

THE GODFATHER: MOB WARS

AKA GODFATHER ACID

Taking a cue from *Metal Gear Acid, The Godfather: Mob Wars'* gameplay uses a "multifaceted card-game system," while retaining quite a bit from the PS2 version. As you build the Corleones' power and territory in 1940s New York, fear and respect are still the guiding concepts, and the choices you make affect how the game plays out. The power of the BlackHand combat system and the pressure-point targeting mechanics also find their way from the console version.

PUB. Activision DEV. Rebellion/Neversoft PLATFORM PSP

GUN SHOWDOWN

GO PSP, YOUNG MAN!

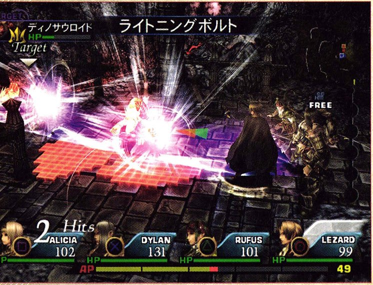
It's encouraging that Randall Jahnson wrote the story for *Gun Showdown*—because it means Neversoft is taking this iteration of its "*GTA* meets the Old West" franchise seriously. *Gun Showdown* introduces five new missions, new game mechanics (stealth and use of explosives), new weaponry (mines and throwing knives), and Wi-Fi multiplayer (four-player deathmatch, Golden Cross, and Last Man Standing). Quickplay includes Texas Hold 'Em and Shotgun games. Yee-haw!

PUB. NIS America DEV. Idea Factory PLATFORM PSP

SPECTRAL SOULS

SOUL PATROL

If you've imported *Shinki Gensou: Spectral Souls II* from Japan, then this PSP remake might look familiar to you (with the exception of English text instead of Japanese characters showing up onscreen). Gamers who checked out *Generation of Chaos* for the PSP might be comfortable with *Spectral Souls*, as the two games share the same development team. But, while *GOC* was like a board game with fighting, *Spectral Souls* is more like a traditional RPG, so put your leveling shoes on.

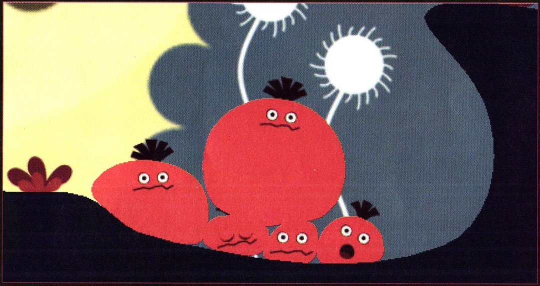


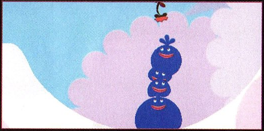
Pub. Square Enix Dev. tri-Ace Platform PS2

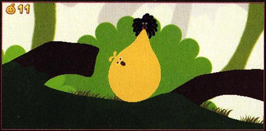
VALKYRIE PROFILE 2: SILMERIA

WACKY WAGNER

Okay, so the first *Valkyrie Profile* is mainly known for two things: its crazy combat system (where each party member is assigned to a face button and you just push said button to execute that member's attack) and its rarity. Now that the PSP version has taken care of its rarity, the sequel ups the ante on combat. We covered the addition of 3D and the leader aspects (where killing the leader instantly ends the battle) last month, but there are quite a few more combat changes. The full 3D arena means that direction matters, as both your party and the baddies have a specific range and direction that they can attack from. You can now split your party into two groups (using the D-pad), and have one group distract the enemy while the second group swings around and attacks from behind. There's also the dash ability, which lets your party quickly close the distance between it and the target—you can't get attacked during the dash, but if you're not careful, you can get smacked right afterward.







PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Sony CEI **PLATFORM** PSP

LOCOROCO

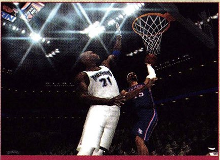
SHAKE IT UP

We've played the demo so much that we could write a thesis on it, we walk around humming the theme music under our breath, and we got busted trying to steal one of the import versions floating around our office. So it's probably not a shock to find out that we are rather looking forward to the U.S. release of *LocoRoco*.

For you under-rock dwellers, here's a summary: You're a planet inhabited by happy little LocoRocos and MuiMuis. One day, you're invaded by the sinister Moja Troop, who like to eat LocoRocos. It becomes your job to shift your planetary surface back and forth in order to roll your peaceful inhabitants to safety.

In addition to the main quest (which has 40 different levels), there are some minigames available as well. Try your hand at the MuiMui Crane—which is pretty much like the toy-catching cranes you find in arcades. In Chuppa Chuppa, hurl LocoRocos through the air while trying to avoid landing on any thorny patches. Rewards for these games include pieces of the Loco House (rated on rarity from one to three stars), which can then be built into playgrounds for your LocoRocos to run around on. If you come up with a structure of which you're particularly proud, you can even share it with a buddy via wireless exchange.

But what people seem to be talking about the most is the goofy, endearing music that provides the game's backdrop. The lyrics are in a fictional language that was made up by SCEI employee Tsutomu Kouno (who also worked on a little game called *Ico*), thus the nonsensical songs can be identical in all the different international versions of the game. We can't wait until some linguistics nerd posts a lyrics translation online.



PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** 989 **PLATFORM** PS2, PSP

NBA 07

BASKETBALL SEASON STARTS WHEN WE SAY IT STARTS

Sony's cager extravaganza hits the courts with tons of additions. Debuting this year are the Smart Shot Indicator—which gives you a heads-up on how defense will affect your shots—and the Power Boarding System, an improved way for players to react to rebounds. There are also over a dozen minigames, including 21, Own the Court, and 3-Point Shootout. And watch for The Life: Volume 2, which gives you a behind-the-scenes look at the life of an NBA pro.

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Canada **Platform** PS2

FIFA 07

We still refuse to call this football, because we are an American publication, and no matter what new features and enhancements this brings, we still think of it as "a new version of that game that's not football."

Pub. EA Sports **Dev.** EA Sports **Platform** PS2

NCAA MARCH MADNESS

When we're not World Cupping, we're obsessing over March Madness. And even if your team gets kicked out early, you can pretend to lead them to Final Four in your own dreamworld via the PS2.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** HudsonSoft **Platform** PSP

BOMBERMAN

Old-school *Bomberman* (with the new twist of being able to store power-ups), but now portable and with support for ad hoc multiplayer? This makes up for that weird next-gen *Bomberman* revamp. Want to know what we thought about it? Read the review on page 85.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** Konami **Platform** PSP

ONLINE CHESS KINGDOMS

OK, so there's a fancy 3D mode with animated dragons and dudes fighting it out square-by-square. Whatever. The most interesting thing is that there is infrastructure play and, apparently, your victories affect the territory that your faction (which you join when you start up) gains on the world map.

Pub. Konami **Dev.** HudsonSoft **Platform** PSP

RENGOKU 2: THE STAIRWAY TO H.E.A.V.E.N.

Yes, they made a sequel, and yes, someone on staff is a Led Zeppelin fan.

Pub. Namco Bandai **Dev.** Namco Bandai **Platform** PS2

IGPX

Did you ever wish *NASCAR* had more action, mechs, and was depicted in an anime that would then spawn an action-racing game? Well, it looks like someone listened to you.

Pub. Namco Bandai **Dev.** Namco Bandai **Platform** PS2

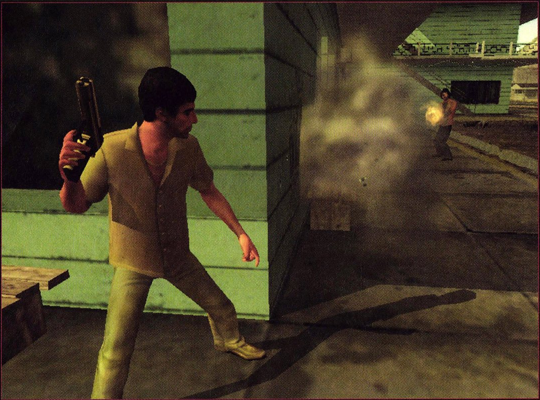
ZATCH BELL: MAMODO FURY

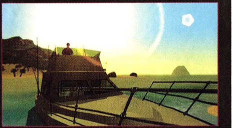
More mamodo mayhem as you play one of 20 characters/demon pairs in this fighting game sequel based on the hit anime.

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Blitz **Platform** PS2

BRATZ: FOREVER DIAMONDZ

You go around the world in search of fashion. You can also partake in figure skating competition and pet shows. You are also a little girl if this interests you.





PUB. Vivendi Universal Games DEV. Radical Entertainment PLATFORM PS2

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

"AMIGO, THE ONLY THING IN THIS WORLD THAT GIVES ORDERS IS BALLS."

Oh, the blood, the screaming, the senseless violence—at the ESRB offices. Yep, the sensitive heads at the game-rating board are going to blow apart like that guy from the movie *Scanners* when Vivendi submits *Scarface: The World Is Yours.* Vying for the title of most brutal and intense game ever, *Scarface* may rankle the sensibilities of even the toughest player.

And that's OK with us. The movie *Scarface*, certainly one of the greatest movies of the 20th century, is an outrageous, no-holds-barred tale of a drug lord's ascent in the Cuban underworld of 1980s Miami. This is not a pretty world, where it's killed or be killed—with guns or chainsaws—in the fight for cocaine dominance. So what's a gamemaker gonna do? A puzzle?

No, try an open-world action fragfest that lets you guide Tony Montana through the brutal underbelly of South Beach and beyond. The tiresome *GTA* comparisons serve as a useful reference point, but *Scarface* is already on a course to stand on its own. Sure, there's the sort of standard follow-the-beam mission structure set in a massive world with plenty of shooting, tons of available weaponry, and vehicles that include limos, Ferraris, and powerboats. There's also the blind rage mode that turns the screen red and switches the game to a first-person shooter when the Rage Meter fills up. (In the final game, this may be called by its former label of "Balls Meter," but Vivendi hadn't decided as of press time.) Even the standard "Mission Failed" message has been replaced with "You F***ed Up."

But no other game has Tony Montana, as near a perfect game protagonist as any before him. Sure, he's based on a movie character, but think about it: Montana is smart, fearless, and brutal. Give him a territory to conquer and a machine gun in hand, and he'll proceed to kill anyone and everyone (and there's a lot of 'em—who die in dramatic, blood-soaked fashion) that stands in the way of his goals. He also throws the F-bomb around like candy in a voiceover that sounds uncannily like Al Pacino. That's right, it's not Al—it's reportedly his New York chauffeur of two years; Vivendi declined to release his name. Besides, Al is old.

So, *Scarface* the game delivers the money, then the power—but what about the women? While Michelle Pfeiffer, who played Tony's love interest in the movie, declined to participate, the game is not without its "romance": It's replete with femmes fatales, "women friends" who spout such random niceties as, "Would you like one of my famous"—we'll let you fill in the blank. And the side game, Pimp My Mansion, brings in the stereotypically feminine occupation of decorating the house, which you can do with anything from bongs to stuffed tigers to space suits—even a cognac fountain.

Right, ESRB, this is not a game for the kids. Not by a long shot.

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Xpec PLATFORM PSP

BOUNTY HOUNDS

GOOD OL'-FASHIONED DOUBLE-FISTED ALIEN ASS-KICKIN'

Oh, the humanity! In the future, humans employ mercenary murder machines called "bounty hounds" to massacre hordes of aliens. In what might best be described as "*Dynasty Warriors* in space," you'll have access to over 500 items (both weapons and armors) and face over 40 enemy species on four worlds. Plus you can dual-wield your alien-ending weapons. Two-player game sharing will provide hours more alien-killing with your friends.

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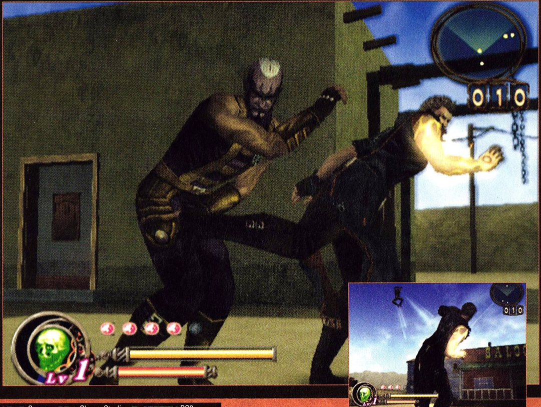


PUB. Capcom DEV. Clover Studios PLATFORM PS2

GOD HAND

FIST OF THE CRAZY STAR

You have to hand it to Clover Studio, it's not content with creating "normal" games. Whether it's the zany time-manipulating, side-scrolling *Viewtiful Joe* franchise or a peaceful game about a wolf goddess who makes things grow and uses calligraphy to change the world (see our *Okami* review on pg. 72), Clover's limited track record speaks of spurning convention when it can. Said track record is maintained by *God Hand*, which on appearance seems like a typical 3rd-person beat-em-up, but in actuality is a beat-em-up with an, ahem, not-too-realistic style about it.

God Hand looks and feels like the boys at Clover took a game like *Final Fight* or *Streets of Rage*, put it in 3D, and made it even zanier. So not only are you progressing through stages and punching the crap out of punks with '80s Mohawks and healing yourself via giant fruit that pops out of both crates and enemies, you're also pulling off super-powerful moves like a kick that propels people towards the moon. Or a hand chop that slices the bad dude's head off. Or you pull off a stomp/pummel/spank move where you button-mash *Track & Field*–style in order to cram as many hits into the maneuver as you can. Or you find yourself fighting a guy with a boomerang for a hand, or a gorilla dressed up in a Lucha Libre costume.

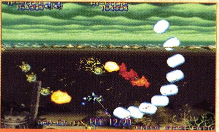
Besides the nuttiness of the game, there's an interesting combat system underneath, where you acquire (via purchases or item pickups) fighting techniques and assign these various moves to different buttons and button combos. For example, we made it so that when you hit Square four times, you get a punch, an uppercut, a sweep kick, and a pimp slap.

FIND YOURSELF FIGHTING A GORILLA DRESSED UP LUCHA LIBRE–STYLE

You pull off the aforementioned super-powerful "roulette" moves by pressing R1 and selecting the move within a brief time limit (you start with three roulette slots, and roulette moves use up different slots depending on their power level). Finally, there's no blocking—just use the right analog stick to evade enemy attacks. The only concern we have at the moment is the game's getting repetitive and looking bland, but, then again, no other game this fall lets you punch a gorilla in the stomach 100 times.

MAD MAD MIKAMI

Would you believe that one of the main dudes behind *God Hand* is Shinji Mikami, who happens to be the creator of the venerable *Resident Evil* franchise. What a big leap, to go from freakin' *RE4* straight to *God Hand*.



PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom PLATFORM PSP

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION RELOADED
IS THAT AN ARCADE IN YOUR PANTS?

Do you remember *Knights of the Round* or *The King of Dragons*? Remember *Eco Fighters*, where you took orders from Dr. Moly and fought dudes who were deforesting the planet? Yeah, you get those three games and more (specifically, games like *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, *1942*, *Commando*, and *Street Fighter II*) all in portable form, with near-arcade-perfect emulation, plus tweaks like widescreen support.

PUB. NIS America DEV. Gust PLATFORM PS2

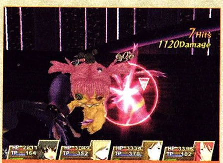
AR TONELICO
HEAD GAMES

The story is a weird tale about a floating tower and three people—warrior dude Lyner, and two girls, Misha and Aurica, who zip around and fight monsters in said tower. So far, it seems like a typical old-school JRPG, except with the quirky aspect of hopping into Misha and Aurica's heads—literally, as you use a machine to project yourself into their psyches. Solving side quests inside these head trips will unlock abilities, which makes this one of the more unique leveling-up concepts to date.

PUB. Eidos DEV. Avalanche Studios PLATFORM PS2

JUST CAUSE
EL PRESIDENTE CHAVEZ BETTER NOT HEAR ABOUT THIS ONE

We actually dig the idea of playing badass CIA operative Rico Rodriguez, tapped to overthrow a corrupt South American junta in a massive open world. We're completely down with the idea of inciting rebellion and allying ourselves with drug cartels and insurgents. And who wouldn't want to go skydiving and parasailing and man over 100 possible land-, sea-, and aircraft in dozens of story, side, and bonus missions with a heaping helping of shooting and explosions?



PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Namco Bandai PLATFORM PS2

TALES OF THE ABYSS
NO WATER ALIENS HERE

Fans of the *Tales* franchise have a snazzy new tale to look forward to. Like previous *Tales* games, you can expect a fair amount of cooking, random skits to break up the game flow, the optional Sword Dancer bosses, the weapon quest, and the Battle Arena. A big change that's been made to combat is the free-roaming battlefield, meaning that you can zip around the map willy-nilly during combat. Plus, the main character looks kind of like Axl Rose, but anime'd up.

PUB. Tecmo DEV. Tecmo PLATFORM PS2

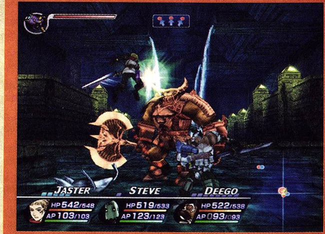
TOKOBOT PLUS: MYSTERIES OF THE KARAKURI
HUNTER, MEET HUNTED

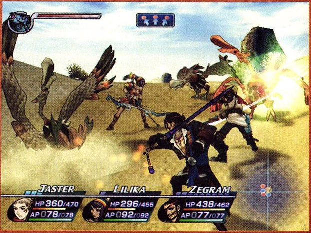
This quirky PSP platformer is doing the reverse of the typical platform jump, as it's now hitting the PS2. *Tokobot Plus* is also a chance for the guys at Tecmo to tweak the game more to their liking, with revisions like a Tokobot upgrade system, the power to steal and use enemy abilities, and a new Overdrive system (which allows for super-powerful attacks). Players who already went through the PSP version will also find PS2-unique levels.

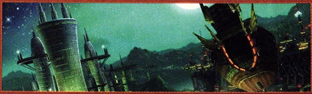
PUB. Konami DEV. Backbone Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

DEATH JR. 2: ROOT OF EVIL
THERE WAS A DEATH JR. 1?

The original *Death Jr.*'s quirky action-platformer gameplay delivered more potential than the goods, so we're hoping that the sequel performs better than its predecessor. This go-round lets you play as either DJ or his goth girlfriend Pandora, with new weapons like the Flaming TP Thrower and the enhanced C4 Hamster Mark II for use in single- and two-player co-op modes. The new rage mode lets our heroes unleash Reaper Madness and Pandemonium upon the hellish minions.



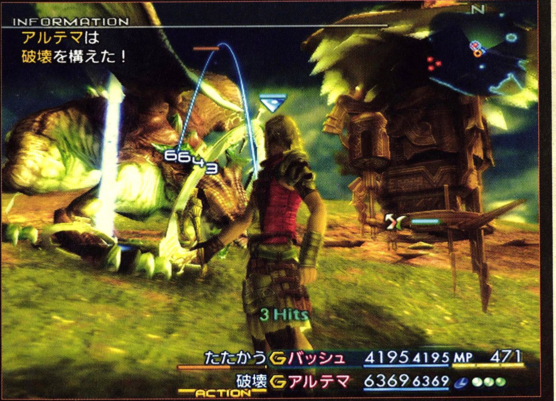


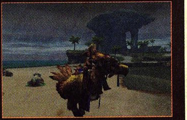


PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Level-5 PLATFORM PS2

ROGUE GALAXY
100 HOURS OF GAME ON THE SCREEN, 100 HOURS OF GAME

Whenever a publisher touts the number of hours it takes to play its game, we usually see it as a challenge. "Over 20 hours of gameplay? Feh—*OPM* beat it in two!" But in the case of Sony's claim that its epic action RPG *Rogue Galaxy* will take "over 100 hours of gameplay," we're not as sure of ourselves. From what we've seen of it so far, *Rogue Galaxy* has the look and depth of its closest cousin, *Dragon Quest VIII*—which makes sense, since Level-5 (also responsible for the superb *Dark Cloud* series) is behind it. Even the long features list alone will seemingly take hours to read: five expansive worlds; eight playable characters; real-time combat; more than 500 weapons that you can gather, build, or combine; more than eight hours of cut-scenes, minigames and side quests; and a story that takes you to the far reaches of the galaxy as only cel-shaded 3D graphics can. Like you, we're counting the hours until *Rogue Galaxy's* release.





PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix PLATFORM PS2

FINAL FANTASY XII

THE LAST GREAT PS2 FF

OK, let's say that you happened to miss last month's *OPM Final Fantasy XII* spectacular, where we completely broke down the combat system, the summons, the characters, and even the role of the chocobo. We're a little sad, but we understand that not everyone reads every issue. Here's a quick rundown of why we're so excited about *FFXII*:

-No random battles.

-New combat system that's flexible enough to let you either micromanage everything or just plan overall strategy and let your characters act on their own.

-Darker, more mature and political story compared to previous titles.

-The option to basically shove the silly-looking Vaan out of the main character role and use a different party member as the main character.

-Badass bosses (those five awesome judges).

-Snazzy-looking graphics, thanks to Squenix's knowledge of developing for the PS2.

For those of you who did read last month's feature, er, we kind of covered everything we know already and haven't had a chance to play much more. Well, did you know that Judge Master Gabranth (the Darth Vader of *FFXII*) is the judge featured in the game's logo? He must be pretty important to be the main logo image, but we won't say why. Hmm...

JUDGE MASTER GABRANTH IS PART OF FFXII'S LOGO. HMM...

PUB. Konami DEV. Climax PLATFORM PSP

STEEL HORIZON

TURN-BASED STRAT WITH REAL-TIME COMBAT

When it comes to handheld gaming, no genre holds a candle to turn-based strategy. Problem is, there are so few. Enter Konami with *Steel Horizon*, a WWII strategy game that emphasizes real-time naval combat within a turn-based framework. In 20 single-player missions, you'll build and command an armada that ranges from battleships to submarines, fighting in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. You'll also play head-to-head through the ad hoc connection.

PUB. Midway DEV. Midway PLATFORM PS2

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

AS TWISTED AS YOU WANT

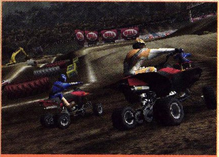
***Armageddon* will** include over 50 (yes, five-zero) characters, but if that vast array of classic fighters doesn't float your boat, you'll be able to create your own with the "kreate-a-fighter" mode. Still not enough? How about a "kreate-a-fatality" option? Yeah, let the sickness out, and put it online to share with your friends. Speaking of online, Midway's promising improved responsiveness and deeper options for your remote-fighting experience.

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom PLATFORM PSP

POWER STONE COLLECTION

SMASH THIS

Capcom's giving you a chance to experience a bit of gaming history by bringing *Power Stone* and *Power Stone 2* (both originally released on the beloved Dreamcast) to the PSP in one convenient package. These two shockingly addictive games allow you to beat up on a friend (or three) in large, interactive arenas replete with handy items with which to pummel your opponent(s) about the head and neck. No big changes from the Dreamcast version, but the four-way ad hoc play is all we need.



PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Climax PLATFORM PSP

ATV OFFROAD FURY PRO

MX BIKES, TROPHY TRUCKS, AND BUGGIES? ROADRAGEOUS!

Sony is back with *ATV Offroad Fury Pro*: bigger, better, faster—and hopefully less difficult than its predecessor. Featuring 30 vehicles, *ATV Offroad Fury Pro* introduces MX bikes, buggies, and trophy trucks to the racing mix in 64 new tracks—including ones from the original (as in PS2) *ATV* games. *Fury Pro* also includes cross-compatibility with the upcoming *ATV Offroad Fury 4* on the PS2, letting you share circuits, upgrade vehicles, and trade cards.

PUB. Midway DEV. Climax PLATFORM PSP

MORTAL KOMBAT: UNCHAINED

"UNCHAINED" AS IN "PORTABLE." GET IT?

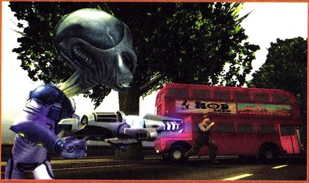
If you couldn't get enough of the *Mortal Kombat*-ified minigames in *MK: Deception*, you're in luck. Puzzle Kombat and Chess Kombat are making a return in portable form. Also expect six new characters (for a total of over 30) and a slightly enhanced konquest mode. Unfortunately, though *Mortal Kombat* is one of the few franchises to take fighting online, *Unchained* will offer only ad hoc wireless multiplayer.

PUB. Atari DEV. Eden Games PLATFORM PS2, PSP

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

HAWAIIAN PUNCH IT

"Massively open online racing." That's how Atari describes *Test Drive Unlimited*, a game set on the 1,000-plus miles of roadway on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. How they're going to fit thousands of players on the island remains to be seen, but it's certainly interesting...as is the 125-car (and bike) garage, the deep customization of both car and driver, and the fact that Atari is billing the PSP version (expected in November) as "one of the first-ever genuinely online games" for the system.



PUB. THQ DEV. Pandemic PLATFORM PS2

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

GROOVY

The goal, and the most entertaining element of the series, is right there in the title: destroying, not just all humans, but all their pitiful dwellings, is good, giddy fun. Trouble with the last game was, there wasn't a whole lot more to keep you playing. Pandemic is looking to address this issue with a much broader scale than the previous game, setting the action all over the planet rather than just in America.

In addition to the wide-ranging destinations (and the corresponding variety of enemies), the wisecracking Crypto now has access to even more alien firepower, including the delightfully devastating meteor strike.

Even more interesting is the addition of splitscreen co-op play, for the simple reason that wholesale destruction is just always more *fun* with a friend. To flesh out the multiplayer experience, the game will also include special two-player minigames, like psychokinetic tennis. (That's just another word for telekinesis, Kyle.)

Part of the fun of the last game was the campy '50s vibe and social satire; this time around, the action has moved into the '60s. We're curious to see how the developers handle a decade that was already pretty over-the-top.

Pub. Atari **Dev.** Spike **Platform** PS2

DRAGON BALL Z BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2

What catches your eye at first glance of this sequel? The fact that there's over 100 characters. You get a No-Prize for coming up with a clever nickname for *DBZ* fans who obsessively unlock all the characters.

Pub. Buena Vista **Dev.** Avalanche Software **Platform** PS2

CHICKEN LITTLE: ACE IN ACTION

Spoiler alert: Chicken Little watches a movie adaptation of his story where he's a cooler chicken called Ace. This game lets you play as Ace. So you're playing a chicken pretending to be a cooler chicken in an action game. Reflect on that.

Pub. Eidos **Dev.** Traveller's Tales **Platform** PS2

BIONICLE HEROES

It's like *Lego Stars Wars*, but with Bionicles instead of normal Legos, no *Star Wars*, and it's a third-person shooter instead of an action/puzzle platformer. So, actually, it's not like *Lego Star Wars* at all.

Pub. Midway **Dev.** Midway **Platform** PS2

THE GRIM ADVENTURES OF BILLY & MANDY

Did you ever think you can take on Death in an arena battle filled with wonderful treasure chests and a plethora of weapons? Then you'll probably enjoy the multiplayer mode, which lets you do precisely that!

Pub. Namco Bandai **Dev.** Namco Bandai **Platform** PS2

EUREKA SEVEN: THE NEW WAVE

What's the next step for mech combat games? Sky-surfing mech combat games! It's like *Back To The Future Part II*, but with mechs!

Pub. Namco Bandai **Dev.** Namco Bandai **Platform** PS2, PSP

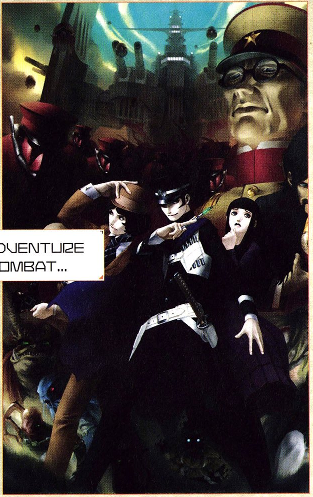
SNOOPY VS. THE RED BARON

This cute little flying action game brings us one step closer to other title bout game ideas like *King Kong vs. Godzilla* and the granddaddy of all face-offs, *The Enterprise vs. the Death Star*.

PUB. Atlus DEV. Atlus PLATFORM PS2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SUMMONER

MEPHISTOPHELES, I CHOOSE YOU!



Okay, the RPG genre is filled with big names like *Final Fantasy* and *Suikoden*, but there's an even more bizarre Japanese moniker you should add: *Shin Megami Tensei*. Sure, the RPGs that bear the *SMT* name tend to be brutally hard dungeon crawlers with pretty sparse stories, but the art style and (as a result of said obscenely hard dungeons) the gameplay are top-notch. Even the more story-driven *SMT: Digital Devil Saga* games had crazy-hard, but satisfying, combat (that required lots of strategic weakness-exploiting and demon recruiting). Maybe Atlus realized that their great RPGs are buried under the harshest of gaming experiences, and are now making a *SMT* title that simply plays a lot easier. Instead of being a dungeon crawler with a few cut-scenes, *Devil Summoner* is basically an adventure game with action-RPG combat. You run around 1920s Tokyo solving crime and ghostly mayhem, and when you fight nasty demons, it's in a real-time 3D arena with a bit of button-mashing (there is still some tactical thought required, as you need to figure out which of your companion demons are powerful against the enemy and summon one to help you out). Hey, if it exposes more people to *SMT's* bizarre and original worlds, we're all for it.

> DEVIL SUMMONER IS AN ADVENTURE GAME WITH ACTION-RPG COMBAT...

Pub. THQ **Dev.** Blitz Games **Platform** PS2

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: CREATURE FROM THE KRUSTY KRAB

Yep, another game for Nicktoons-crazed kids to covet. Our crystal ball tells us to expect wacky schemes from Plankton that get thwarted through SpongeBob's lovable incompetence. Yeah, we know—we're good.

Pub. THQ **Dev.** THQ **Platform** PS2, PSP

AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER

This has nothing to do with James Cameron's next movie and everything to do with the Nicktoons show.

Pub. THQ **Dev.** THQ **Platform** PS2, PSP

NICKTOONS: BATTLE FOR VOLCANO ISLAND

If you threw characters from *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Danny Phantom*, *The Fairly Oddparents*, and *Jimmy Neutron* into a single action game, this would be that game.

Pub. Vivendi Universal **Dev.** Krome **Platform** PS2

SPYRO: A NEW BEGINNING

Krome, the developers of the lovable *TY the Tasmanian Tiger* series of games, is trying to pretend that 1998's *Spyro* never happened and that this combat-focused game is the true beginning.

Pub. Midway **Dev.** Midway **Platform** PSP

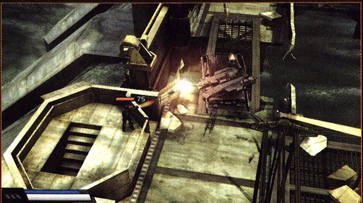
BLITZ: THE LEAGUE

Portable, unlicensed football brutality? Sign us up. Midway won't drop any details on us about this one, but if it's as good as its PS2 counterpart, we'll be pleased.

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Guerrilla PLATFORM PSP

KILLZONE: LIBERATION

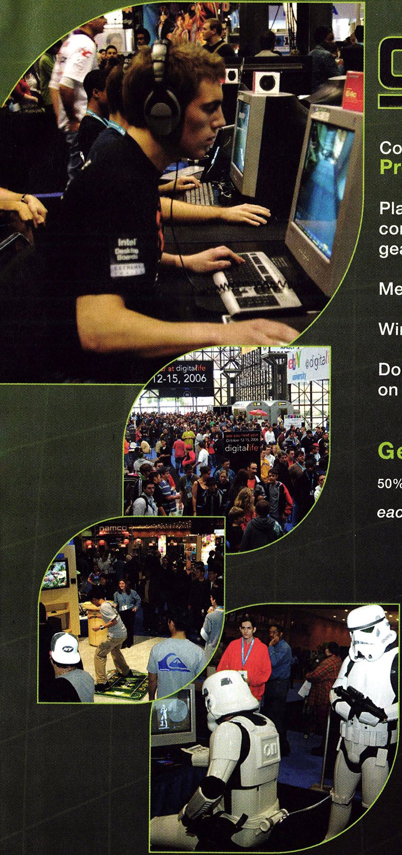
COME HELGHAST OR HIGH WATER



There's a funny thing about PSP games. Sometimes the system seems too powerful, forcing developers to try to re-create PS2 experiences poly-for-poly on its small screen, generally with poor results. Sometimes, a developer recognizes that the system can offer something different from the PS2, and the idea opens up all kinds of creative freedom.

It looks like that's what happened with *Killzone: Liberation*. Rather than attempting to port the graphics-intensive PS2 game, Guerrilla is taking a different direction, moving to an overhead perspective and throwing in all kinds of interesting extras to flesh out the game's 16 missions. Issue commands to teammates! Take control of vehicles! Play any of the single-player missions with a friend! The game will even include minigame-style challenges that will imbue your character with new abilities that carry over into story mode.

With a story that picks up just two months after the events of the original *Killzone*, *Liberation* seems to be expanding the *Killzone* universe in a number of different directions. Will this PSP outing be enough to tide us over until the PS3 release? Well, probably not. But it sure looks good.



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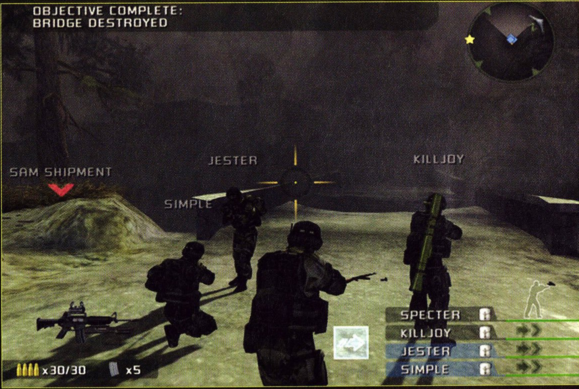
NOVEMBER

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Zipper PLATFORM PS2

SOCOM: U.S NAVY

FOUR STEPS TO FPS SUCCESS


OBJECTIVE COMPLETE:
BRIDGE DESTROYED
SAM SHIPMENT
JESTER
KILLJOY
SIMPLE
SPECTER
KILLJOY
JESTER
SIMPLE
x30/30
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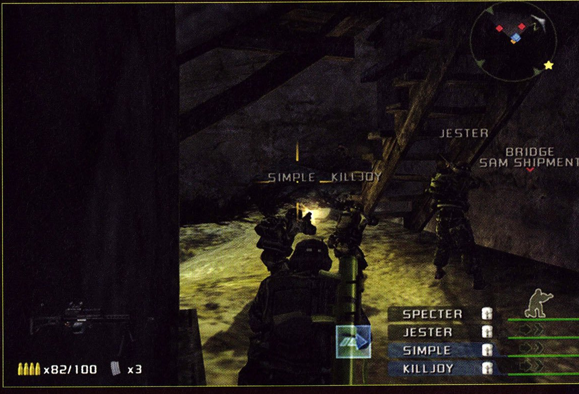
JESTER
BRIDGE
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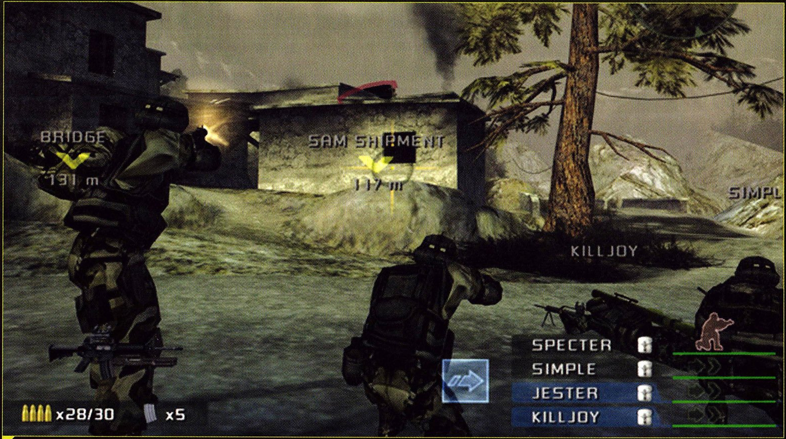
SPECTER
JESTER
SIMPLE
KILLJOY
x82/100
x3

SEALS COMBINED ASSAULT



SOCOM's campaign mode has generally been ignored by most players, who tend to focus their attentions on the series' excellent online play. So, developer Zipper is making another effort to bring the players' attention back to the campaign—this time by offering four-player co-operative play.

Given the four-man squad format of the previous games' single-player campaigns, it's a logical progression, and Zipper is prepared to support the co-op mode with all the resources used to keep *SOCOM 3*'s online modes humming. That means ranking, ladders, buddy lists, messaging—basically everything you'll find in *SOCOM 3*.

Which is both good and bad. Good, because *SOCOM 3*'s online play was the best yet. Bad, because *Combined Assault* won't be making *any* changes to that formula for its competitive multiplayer modes. The idea is to offer full compatibility with *SOCOM 3* players, but it feels a bit slim to have only the promise of a few new maps to tide us over until the inevitable PS3 sequel.

That said, the improvements to the campaign mode are plenty intriguing. Perhaps most interesting is the ability to use nonlethal weapons like tear gas and concussion grenades to subdue enemy combatants. The idea of being rated on the amount of collateral damage your team inflicts adds another layer of depth to an already deep game.

Other new features include more vehicles (with three different vehicle classes, so you can pick the appropriate ride for the task) and a complete retooling of the enemy AI system to allow for more lifelike behavior. You'll also find a much more extensive "cross-talk" system, which allows accomplishments in *Combined Assault* to influence gameplay in *Fireteam Bravo 2* on the PSP—and vice versa. And *Combined Assault* will take a page from *Fireteam Bravo* and provide "instant action" missions in any completed area.

The bottom line here, though, is the co-op play. We're very interested to see how well the single-player campaign translates.

> THE MOST INTERESTING IMPROVEMENT IS THE ABILITY TO USE NONLETHAL WEAPONS.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS

For those of you who don't know, the "SOCOM" stands for "(S)pecial (O)perations (COM)mand." Each SOCOM (there's one per military branch) is overseen by the United States Special Operation Command (USSOCOM). We're curious to see what happens when the different SOCOMs are put into a big cage fight.

METAL MONSTER

PUB. Activision/RedOctane DEV. Harmonix PLATFORM PS2

GUITAR HERO II

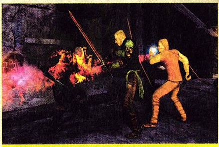
AX AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

Having now had plenty of time to sit down and do some serious rocking with *Guitar Hero II*—especially rocking of the two-player variety—we're in a fine position to offer up a little more detail on what's quickly become one of our most anticipated releases of the fall. (Yes, we know the PS3 comes out this fall. No, that fact doesn't change anything.)

About the song list, well, we know as much as you do at this point. So far, RedOctane has only revealed a handful of tunes, probably because the deals are still being inked. Instead of dwelling too much on the list—'cause if you've played the first game, you'll be as confident of a top-notch lineup as we are—we'll focus instead on the major new feature: two-guitar action.

Multiplayer in the first *Guitar Hero* was a fairly simple affair. You'd "trade licks" back and forth and maybe share a power chord or two, but generally, one player sat idle for a measure while the other rocked out. Not so with *GHII*—these tunes have fully fleshed out guitar or bass parts for both players. The difference is startling, bringing the experience so much closer to the feeling of playing a real guitar.

Especially intriguing are the extremely bass-heavy "YYZ" (Rush) and "John the Fisherman" (Primus), in which the bass sections are more complex than the guitar. And by "complex" we mean, "causing exquisite, physical pain to the inexperienced player." In these cases, the two instrumental parts are so different that it's easy to get thrown off by what your bandmate is playing, which is our only concern.

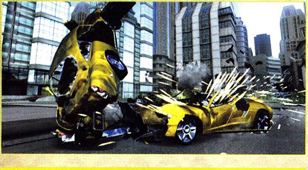


PUB. Vivendi Universal DEV. Stormfront
PLATFORM PS2, PSP

ERAGON

ENTER THE DRAGON

Based on the movie that's based on the book, the game isn't as bad as you might expect a licensed title to be. It's being developed by the studio that made EA's excellent *LOTR: The Two Towers*. You also get to fly around on a dragon, which is always cool (the PS2 game also incorporates ground missions, while the PSP version is dragon-only). And as titular character Eragon, you'll be able to get help from a second player who can jump in and out to play as support characters. Cool.



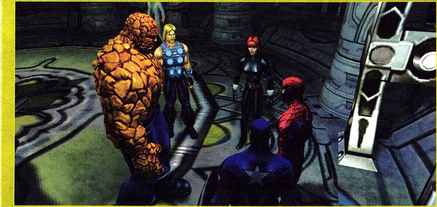
PUB. Sega DEV. Pseudo PLATFORM PS3

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES
FULL METAL RACKET

Console launch lineups are usually laden with shooters and racing games, but only in *Full Auto 2: Battlelines* will you get both genres in one title. The game brings the wild and wonderful world of car combat to interactive life on the PS3.

In addition to races, you'll have six multiplayer modes available, including full-scale arena combat with up to eight participants. Unlike the prior title (which was Xbox360-exclusive), the available weapons will be dependent upon which of the 27 cars you pick. Once you've chosen a car, you'll be able to combine any pair of weapons, rather than being forced to choose from predetermined pairings; weapons will come in both front- and rear-mount types.

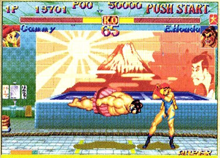
Some critiqued the 360 version's physics—many felt the cars handled as if they were too light—but the team will be addressing that in *Battlelines*. Also expect Unwreck (the feature that allows you to rewind time) to be harder to earn than it was before. And in case you were stressing out about glass cracking, you can relax: Sega promises that there will be "improved windshield texture spidering damage." Thank goodness—we hate it when *that* isn't accurate!



PUB. Activision DEV. Raven Software PLATFORM PS3, PS2, PSP

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE
YOU WIN A NO-PRIZE!

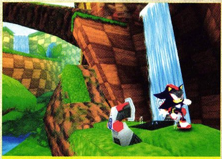
If you've been following games based on the Marvel superheroes even a little, you're aware that the two *X-Men Legends* action-RPGs are among the best in that subgenre. It was only a matter of time before Raven and Activision expanded the gameplay possibilities to include heroes and villains from all of Marveldom. That time is now—well, November, to be more precise. With over 140 characters to call upon, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* assembles the largest roster ever to defend the world from Dr. Doom and the re-formed Masters of Evil. Create your team of four from the likes of Captain America, Spider-Man, and Thor, leading them through combat in Atlantis, on the S.H.I.E.L.D. Helicarrier, and the Skrull homeworld (watch out for giant-purple-hat-wearing world-eater Galactus). Online play will bring you closer to three of your buddies in several competitive co-op modes. Excelsior!



PUB. Capcom DEV. Digital Eclipse PLATFORM PS2

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOLUME 2
RELIVE THE WASTING OF YOUR YOUTH

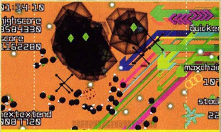
Like its little brother (see *Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded* for PSP), this compilation includes old-school arcade games like *The King of Dragons* and others. But it also has two interesting additions: *Quiz & Dragons*—a trivia game that will quiz you on Capcom history—and *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. Yes, the insanely hardcore, "ultimate" version of *Street Fighter II*. Plus, there are a bunch of other classic games.



PUB. Sega DEV. Backbone Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

SONIC RIVALS
BLAST PROCESSING

Hey, Sonic's first game for the PSP is not, as expected, a traditional Sonic platformer (while its cousin, *Sonic Rush* for the DS, is). Sega likes to call *Sonic Rivals* a "racing platformer," where Sonic does his spinning, jumping, and running—but now in a competition with other *Sonic* characters (such as Knuckles and Shadow). The developers are taking the basic Sonic formula and translating it into 3D space to take advantage of the PSP's horsepower. Hooray portable hedgehogs!



PUB. Buena Vista DEV. Q Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA
MAY I HAVE SOME MORE?

Most puzzle games don't have a plot (unless you count that feud between the dreaded L block and the rest of the *Tetris* clan), so the backstory of the original Flash game *Every Extend* (which includes the phrase "'Suicidal explodion' game with new feelings") makes us giggle. Not surprisingly, the story is insignificant; what we care about is that Tetsuya Mizuguchi (the man behind *Rez* and *Lumines*) incorporates music as a vital part of the game, fusing graphics with rhythm—resulting in more digital crack. Yay!

RIDGE RACER!

Hey, don't think that we forgot the latest installment of Sony CEA president Kaz Hirai's favorite Sony launch title, *Ridge Racer*. Yes, there is a new *Ridge Racer* (number seven!) coming out for the launch of a new Sony product (the PS3 in this case). Except the boys at Namco were so busy, they weren't able to send over new assets. Check later!

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Insomniac PLATFORM PS3

RESISTANCE: FALL

FOUR STEPS TO FPS SUCCESS

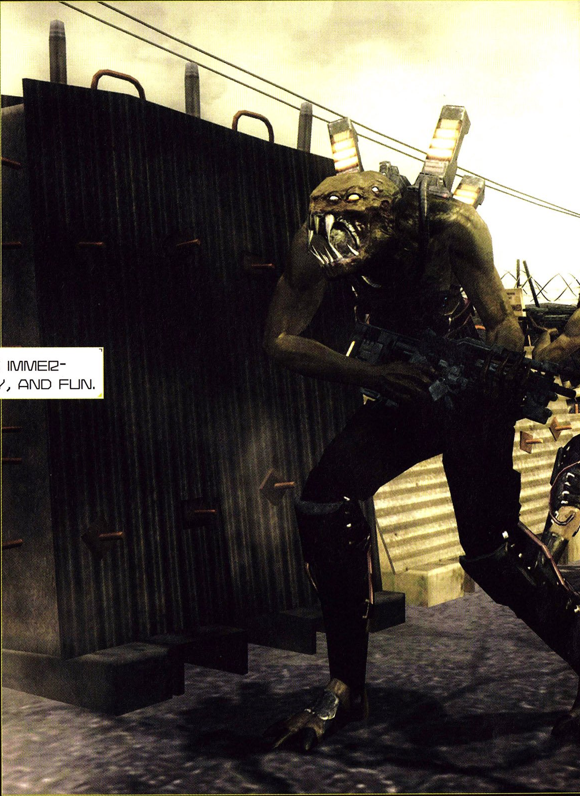
"This game," says Insomniac head Ted Price, "is about four things: immersion, believability, creepiness, and fun." It's a typically no-nonsense Insomniac approach. There's no talk of being the Next Big Thing or revolutionizing the genre; such talk from the developers of the vastly entertaining, but not exactly world-changing *Ratchet & Clank* would likely elicit snickers anyhow. Rather, Insomniac's goal here is much more modest: to make a first-person shooter that's immersive, believable, creepy, and fun.

When you get your hands on *Resistance*, you realize that the developers aren't reaching too far outside of the FPS box. The game feels like a mashup of *Medal of Honor* and *Half-Life 2*; the environments have a gritty, WWII-era feel, but you're fighting hordes of creepy aliens (we noticed a giant alien that looks somewhat inspired by the striders of *Half-Life 2*) instead of hordes of creepy Nazis. Dark hallways bring up memories of *Doom 3*, while scripted events bring *Red Faction* to mind. (One particularly interesting example of scripting is seeing one of your vast army of compatriots struggling with an enemy twice his size; move in and take out the enemy, and you'll have one more piece of hardware covering your back.)

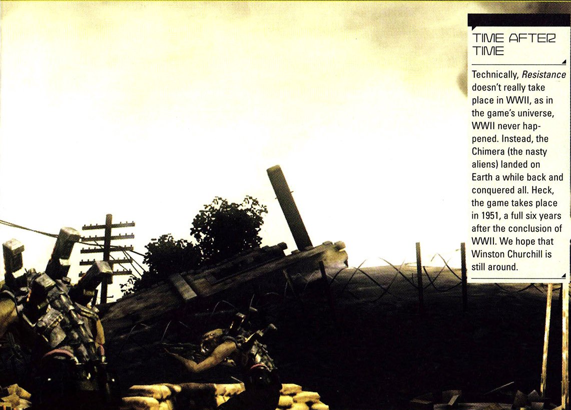
> MAKE A SHOOTER THAT IS IMMERSIVE, BELIEVABLE, CREEPY, AND FUN.

It's not until you start to really play around with the weapons that you realize that you're dealing with the team that made *Ratchet & Clank*. Unusual weaponry is very much their forte, and squeezing unusual weapons like the homing (handy for when you're just too lazy to even try aiming) Bullseye or the boring (we don't mean the opposite of new and interesting things, such as migratory habits of rabid ocelots, but we mean the act of, well, *drilling holes*) Augur into environments so reminiscent of the WWII FPS craze does put a fresh new spin on things. Mixing realistic settings with patently unrealistic weapons (not to mention unrealistic enemies—like the ones who can crawl along ceilings and walls) makes for a pleasant juxtaposition.

As a launch title, *Resistance* will no doubt serve as one of the showcase pieces of the shiny new hardware. It'll probably be packed to the (alien) gills with flashy lights, luminescent colors, and spiffy sound. Let's just hope there's enough content to back up the flash.



OF MAN



TIME AFTER TIME

Technically, *Resistance* doesn't really take place in WWII, as in the game's universe, WWII never happened. Instead, the Chimera (the nasty aliens) landed on Earth a while back and conquered all. Heck, the game takes place in 1951, a full six years after the conclusion of WWII. We hope that Winston Churchill is still around.

PUB. Sega DEV. Sonic Team PLATFORM PS3

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

SONIC'S SOPHOMORE YEAR

How do you celebrate the 15th anniversary of a furry blue hedgehog? Have him make the leap to the PS3—and introduce a new friend while you're at it! Sonic's new pal is Silver the Hedgehog, and while Sonic maintains his signature speed, Silver prefers to use his telekinetic powers to manipulate objects and solve puzzles. Oh, and Sonic's gun-toting pal, Shadow, is also playable. Though all we've seen him do is drive a jeep around. A hedgehog that drives instead of runs seems lazy.

PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Games PLATFORM PS2, PSP

THE SIMS 2: PETS

THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE OF OLD YELLER

You buy them fancy food, you order custom-made beds, you even put them in little outfits—so it's only natural that you'd want them to be a part of your videogames, too. Pets, which are—not surprisingly—the most-requested addition for *The Sims*, are making their first appearance on console versions of the game. And the awesome thing is that cleaning up digital poop is a whole lot less smelly than the real thing. EA had us at "poop."

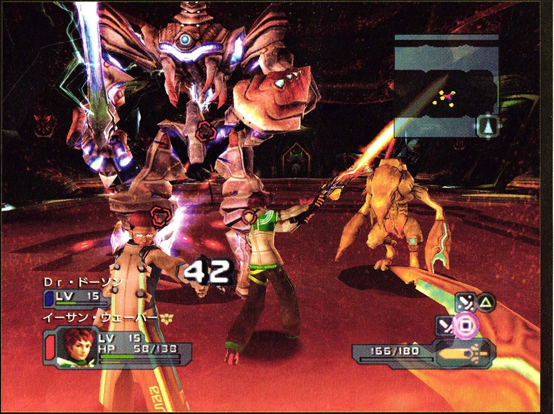
PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom PLATFORM PSP

CAPCOM PUZZLE WORLD

TETRIS FIGHTERS

The fact that this collection includes the completely awesome *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* (which is kind of a *Tetris*-type game enhanced by *SF* and *Darkstalkers* characters) is really all we need to know—we're already clearing off shelf space for it. But if you're a hard sell, then you might be interested to know that you'll also be getting the *Buster Bros. Collection* (which compiles three *Buster Bros.* games) and *Block Block* (which is basically *Breakout*). We might be easy, but it works for us.

NOVEMBER



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LV 4
ヒューガ・ライト
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イーサン・ウェーバー

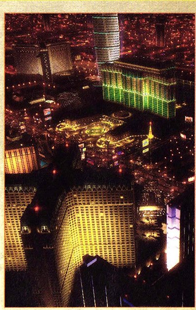
PUB. Sega DEV. Sonic Team PLATFORM PS2

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

SINGLE RPGER SEEKS PSU FAN FOR PARTY FUNTIME

Hey, if you're an RPG fan and are also the kind of person who has buckets of free time on your hands (independently wealthy, unemployed, slacking in college), then *Phantasy Star Universe* is right up your alley. First, you get a galaxy-spanning single-player game that can take about 40 hours to get through—that might sound a bit small compared to monstrosities like *Dragon Quest VIII* or the upcoming *Rogue Galaxy*, but those games lack *PSU*'s other advantage: online multiplayer. *Phantasy Star* fans have already experienced the addictive nature of online multiplayer action-RPGing on the DreamCast, the Xbox, the GameCube, and even the PC. Now, finally, PS2 players can join the party (in fact, up to six PS2 players can join). Whether you're a veteran or a newbie, you'll appreciate the new features like strafing, duel-wielding, combat lock-on, and so forth. It's one thing to smack a weird space dragon on your own, but it's six times as awesome to deliver that same smackdown with five of your *PSU*-playing buddies online.

> 40 HOURS MIGHT SOUND SHORT, BUT THAT'S BEFORE MULTIPLAYER.

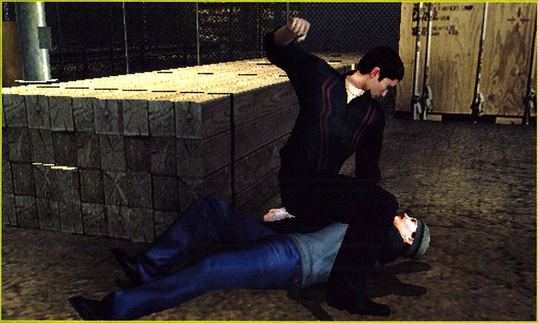


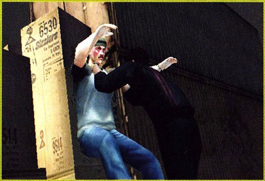
PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft Montreal PLATFORM PS3

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

TOURIST SAFETY ADVISORY NOTICE

OK, the *Rainbow Six* franchise has always prided itself on giving a pretty damn good simulation of counterterrorism, what with its realistic scenarios, proper modeling of equipment, and emphasis on squad tactics. Now the franchise can add a "hits a little too close to home, makes city officials nervous" bullet point to its list of accomplishments. Case in point: The mayor of Las Vegas is actually worried about people thinking Vegas isn't a safe city due to how realistic the Vegas-getting-attacked-by-terrorists scenario looks in *Rainbow Six Vegas.* Using the power of the PS3, bombs explode, windows shatter, Team Rainbow members rappel, and neon lights glitter. Other overall improvements and tweaks include new gadgets like a fiber-wire that slips under a door (á la *Splinter Cell*), followed by the ability to "tag" enemy targets (which assign Team Rainbow members to specific targets) for better tactical planning, recharging health (while rested), and occasional third-person viewing (such as when blind-firing around a corner).





PUB. THQ DEV. 7 Studios PLATFORM PS2

THE SOPRANOS: ROAD TO RESPECT

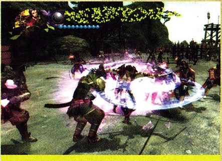
BADA-BING GOES THE CASH REGISTER

What's a mafia license without an accompanying videogame? In *The Sopranos: Road to Respect,* you'll play as newly created character Joey LaRocca, who is Big Pussy's bastard son and is about the same age as AJ Soprano. As is de rigueur in organized-crime-based games, you'll have to earn the respect of the family (and in this case, prove you're not a rat fink like your father was) by doing a series of menial tasks and slowly working your way up the ladder. In *The Sopranos*, your missions will revolve around a war being waged between the Jersey-based Sopranos and a rival family from Philadelphia.

Developer 7 Studios (who also did the game adaptations for last year's *Fantastic 4* and this summer's *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow*) is working with series creator David Chase to write a story that stays true to the plotlines of the television show; the events of the game will be set between season five and season six. Key actors (including James Gandolfini) will be voicing their roles for the game, and main character LaRocca is played by Christian Maelen.

> THE EVENTS OF THE GAME TAKE PLACE BETWEEN SEASON 5 AND 6.

The whole thing sounds kind of like *The Godfather: The Game,* doesn't it? Well, that game turned out to be better than our original expectations; maybe *The Sopranos* will surprise us, too.



PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Game Republic PLATFORM PS3

GENJI 2

HISTORICALLY ACCURATE GIANT-CRAB COMBAT

Touted as having double the playtime of its predecessor (which was knocked for being too easy and too short), *Genji 2* kicks the *Dynasty Warriors* mash-n-hack formula up a few notches with four playable characters you can switch on the fly in huge battlefields with hundreds of enemies. The setting is feudal Japan, and—monster crabs aside—the fighting is intense. It's also authentic, as Game Republic tapped master swordsman Mitsuhiko Seike as choreographer.

PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Tiburon PLATFORM PS3

MADDEN NFL 07

PRO-MOTION

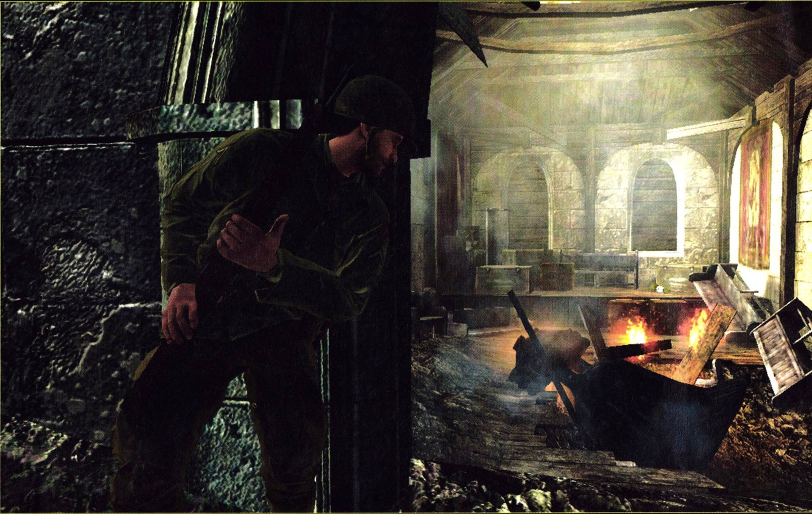
Suffice it to say, for *Madden NFL 07* to continue its role of football juggernaut, it's going to have to set high goals. Surprisingly, little is known about the game, except that everything will be better—from character design and control to plays and play-calling. Oh yeah, and it will probably look pretty good, too. We're particularly curious to see how EA will use the PS3's motion-sensor feature. We're thinking maybe they can use it for throwing and kicking. Crazy!

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Q Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

GUNPEY

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Basing a game off a title that was originally created by the late Gunpei Yokoi—the man behind the original Game Boy—is a pretty sound business plan. After all, Yokoi showed that he might have an idea about what people like in portable gaming. The basic concept has you lining up segments across five columns to eliminate the pieces. And as you would expect from Q Entertainment (the company that brought you *Lumines*), there will also be snazzy graphics choreographed to house beats.



PUB. Activision DEV. Treyarch PLATFORM PS3, PS2

CALL OF DUTY 3

REACH OUT AND FRAG SOMEONE

For a while, *Call of Duty* would totally rock the PC and even the Xbox platforms, and we'd get a pretty-good-but-obviously-not-the-original version on the PS2. Now, thanks to the power of the PS3, we're getting a true entry in the *Call of Duty* franchise.

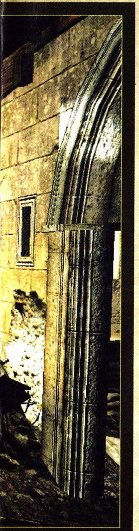
While many WWII shooters tend to focus on D-Day, *COD3* decides to focus on the days after D-Day, the harsh battle to maintain control of France. On top of typical *COD* exploits such as Nazi-shooting and vehicle-driving, there will be new moments such as riding shotgun (well, if "sitting next to the turret" counts as "shotgun") on a tank and being its spotter (where you look at a target with your binoculars, and boom, there it was), or deciding whether to snipe, blow up, or just plain run 'n' gun up to a machine-gun nest (previous games were pretty linear, and this freedom of choice is a new thing).

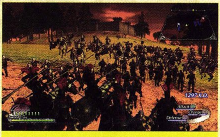
In another nod to those now-ubiquitous "looks like a cut-scene until you're told to press X at the right time to move on" moments (thanks *Shenmue, God of War*, and *RE4!*), *COD3* now has those types of moments during fistfights. One example we saw was when you check out a house, thinking everything is clear until a slick German soldier jumps you and starts shoving his rifle into your face. By hitting the L1 and R1 buttons on the DualTiltWhatever controller, you fight off the German's initial attack. The rest of the melee fight continues in first-person (kind of reminds us of Namco's *Breakdown* for the Xbox), with button-prompts breaking things up. With both *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* and *Medal of Honor Airborne* moving to next year, traditional WWII junkies don't need to worry about three WWII shooters competing for their dollars this fall.

> THANKS TO THE POWER OF THE PS3, WE'RE GETTING A TRUE COD TITLE...

NORMANDY BREAKOUT

Call of Duty 3 will focus on Operation Cobra, which was the post-D-Day invasion plan to rapidly expand Allied influence within France. The basic plan called for the Allies to get their reinforcements in quickly while denying Germany's reinforcements. Ultimately, the Allies won, and only stopped advancing because they ran out of food.





I PUB. Koei DEV. Omega Force PLATFORM PS3

BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

BURGUNDIAN WARRIORS

Omega Force, the internal Koei studio behind the *Dynasty* and *Samurai Warriors* games, now brings us the next-gen *Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War*, this time moving west to focus on the succession of conflicts between England and France (and later the Duchy of Burgundy) fought between 1337 and 1453. Reportedly capable of displaying up to 65,000 characters onscreen at once, *Bladestorm* could be a Category 5 on the hack-n-slash meter.

I PUB. LucasArts DEV. Frontier PLATFORM PS2, PSP

THRILLVILLE

PUTTING THE AMUSEMENT BACK IN AMUSEMENT-PARK MANAGEMENT

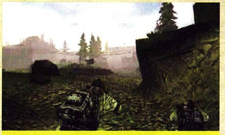
Not only will *Thrillville* let you test out your coasters, but you'll also actually be able to play midway games (including bumper cars and shooting galleries) and even hold conversations with the guests of your park. Better yet, other players will be able to visit your park in multiplayer mode—including the PSP version (also out in November), which will support ad hoc play and the ability to trade designs wirelessly.

I PUB. LucasArts DEV. Kuju PLATFORM PSP

TRAXION

IT AIN'T VIB-RIBBON, BUT IT'LL DO

Wait. Is it possible someone's actually started to think outside the box with regard to the PSP? *Traxion* is a series of games that use MP3s on your memory stick to generate ever-changing musical experiences, from a falling-block game generated by the beat of your tunes to a simple fighting game in which your enemies are created based on qualities of your songs. And it even acts as a playlist organizer for your PSP! Is this some kind of alternate universe? We'd like to stay awhile, if that's OK.



I PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Zipper PLATFORM PSP

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

BE NICE TO THE LOCALS

Aiming for a more realistic experience than the previous *Fireteam Bravo*, Zipper is heavily revamping many of the basics for the sequel. Also, now you earn "local influence" by treating civilians with respect—and spraying machine-gun fire willy-nilly will hamper your ability to access black markets for special gear. Furthermore, the developers are adding three multiplayer modes for the excellent 16-player infrastructure play, including Capture the Flag.

I PUB. Eidos DEV. Volatile PLATFORM PS2

RESERVOIR DOGS

WASTE THE RAINBOW

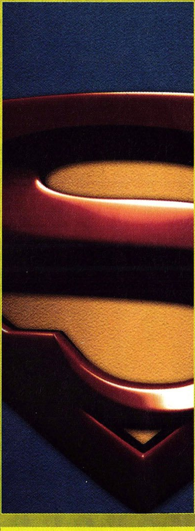
Finally! A game where casting Michael Madsen makes sense! Work your way through a series of third-person shooting and driving missions as you trace the events of the original Tarantino film (which has been fleshed out so that you'll get to play for more than just a couple of hours) about a bunch of thief types going by color-based aliases. You'll have the choice whether to be trigger-happy or whether to play it cool—and, as expected, what you choose will affect how the game plays.

I PUB. Buena Vista DEV. Q Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

LUMINES II

THE BIGGEST PUZZLE IS: "WHY?"

You loved *Lumines*? Then you'll love this! Or maybe you'll just feel ripped off. Despite the inclusion of a "II" in the title, this is a second verse that's darn near identical to the first. Gameplay is *exactly* the same, but now there's video in the background (which can be busy enough that it's tough to focus) and new music (which is impeccably cool as always). We couldn't stop playing the original *Lumines*, but unless this title comes at a bargain-basement price, our money will go to *Every Extend Extra*.

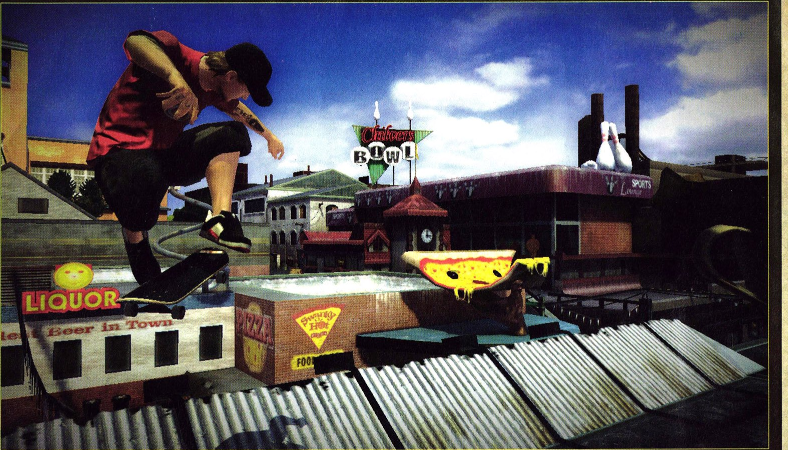


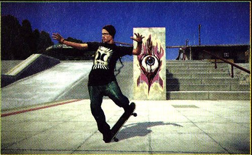
I PUB. EA DEV. EA Tiburon PLATFORM PS2, PSP

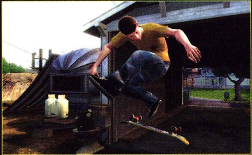
SUPERMAN RETURNS

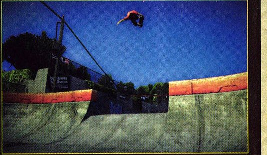
MAN OF STEEL, WOMAN OF KLEENEX

Even though Supes has a storied history with game transitions, no matter what the final result of EA's try at having him return to gaming, we'll give them credit for the following: Superman is invincible in this game. Finally, someone understands that Superman should *not* have a life meter, since he's freakin' Superman! OK, he does have a stamina meter (which is tied to his powers, so using them depletes it; one way to recharge it fast is to fly upward toward the sun), and there is a life bar of sorts—except it measures Metropolis' life, not Supes. So if Metropolis suffers too much damage from the likes of Metallo (the game draws from both the comics and the movie), then it's game over. Another detail that we particularly like: a mode where you get to play as Bizarro! Bizarro mode am bad (that means that it rocks)!









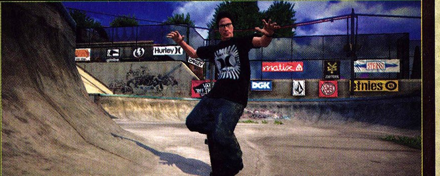
PUB. Activision DEV. Neversoft PLATFORM PS3, PS2, PSP

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

SK8 OR DIE

You did read our extensive cover story about this game a few months back, didn't you? Good, good. Then we can just go ahead and bring you up to date with new information. Like, for example, the fact that *Project 8* is going to feature more of an emphasis on film and photo goals, whether that be pulling off tricks in a photo shoot or following the direction of a filmmaker with a handicam. Or the fact that civilians will play a bigger role than ever before, offering feedback, respect—even abuse—in response to your boarding skills.

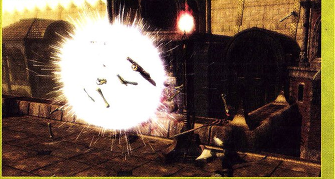
And we can also tell you that the game is now confirmed for release on the PS2 (with Shaba Games handling translation) and the PSP (from Page 44 Studios, of *Freekstyle* fame). All three versions should be coming out in November. Now how will you choose?

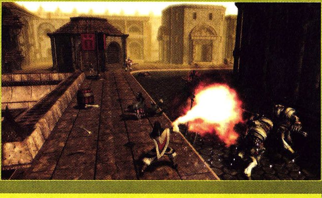


PUB. Sony Online DEV. Sony Online PLATFORM PS3

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

CAST MAGIC MISSILE INTO THE DARKNESS!

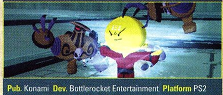




It's not a system launch unless you have mindless bashing, and Sony Online happily obliges with *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom.* The development team recently revealed the mage, which is the third and final character (along with Golan the warrior and Zala the scout) that will be initially included in game. As you might be able to deduce, the mage relies primarily on magic, which means he's good for ranged attacks but doesn't have a lot of hit points.

While several of the mage's spells are your standard RPG magician fare—shooting flames, exchanging mana for health, teleporting out of the way, slowing down enemies—and he's also got a few more unusual options up his sleeve. We're anxious to try out the spell that allows him to charm enemies into becoming his allies. Magic aside, our favorite thing about him is his nifty ninja-looking outfit. That, and he goes by the magnificent moniker of Malakesh. Who cares how he is in combat? That's a dude you wanna party with!

All of this will be accompanied by an original score, recently recorded in the Czech capital of Prague and composed by Laura Karpman, who has an impressive list of awards (several Emmys) to her credit.



Pub. Konami Dev. Bottlerocket Entertainment Platform PS2

XIAOLIN SHOWDOWN

If you watch the kid's WB show that this game is based on, and are a big fan of the *PowerStone* games, then this game was lovingly crafted with you in mind.

MARVEL

Pub. Konami Dev. Konami Platform PSP

MARVEL TRADING CARD GAME

All we want to know is whether there will be cards for losers like Speedball and Turner D. Century.

Pub. Konami Dev. Konami Platform PSP

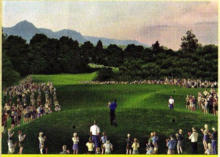
WINX CLUB: JOIN THE CLUB

This is a test. We know that the average reader is a post-college dude. But if you're a little girl who watches this show and is anticipating this game, let us know. Really.

Pub. Buena Vista Dev. A2M Platform PS2

KIM POSSIBLE: WHAT'S THE SWITCH?

The Switch is when Ron Stoppable's mind switches with Doctor Drakken; so Kim and bad boy Shego team up to unswitch it.

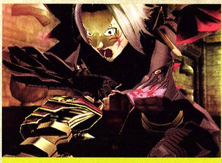


PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA RS PLATFORM PS3, PS2, PSP

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

TIGER + PS3 – TIME TRAVEL = SWEET

We're so pleased we won't have to chase Tiger through time in career mode that we'll happily take EA's word for the importance of "universal facial capture (UCAP) technology," which makes Tiger Woods look "so real, you won't believe your eyes." You'll also find new PGA courses and new PGA players, which you'll be able to appreciate with the new picture-in-picture camera. But let's hope the "just a little tougher" swing system doesn't prove too frustrating.

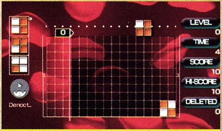


PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. CyberConnect2 PLATFORM PS2

.HACK//G.U. VOL. 1// REBIRTH

MAYBE THE WORLD IS ENOUGH

Like MMOs, but hate people? Then *.hack// G.U. Vol. 1//Rebirth,* a single-player game set within an MMO world called *The World,* is probably right up your alley. And since the story line traces main character Haseo's quest to slaughter all the player killers in *The World*, you'll virtually get your revenge on all those jerkfaces who kept rushing you when all you needed to do was finish the last piece of a quest for that fancy +20 breastplate you'd been coveting.



PUB. Buena Vista DEV. Q Entertainment PLATFORM PSP

LUMINES PLUS

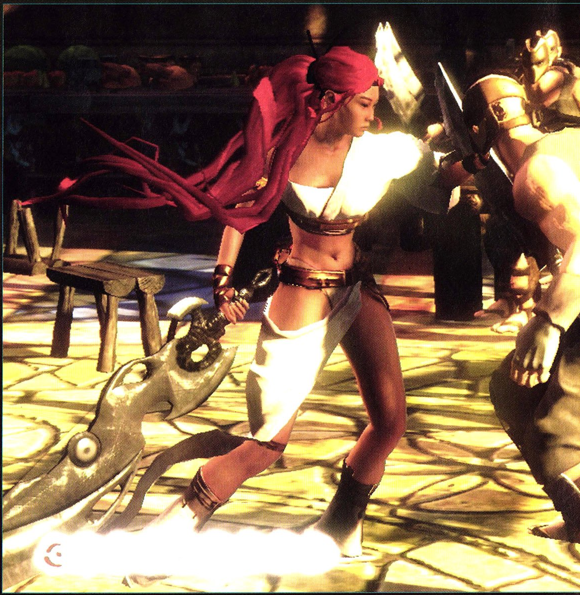
GREAT PUZZLE GAMING GOES COUCH-BOUND

Gamers who don't have a PSP will finally be able to sample one of the best titles to appear on the handheld system, as the PS2 version of the popular puzzler is finally coming to a television near you. There are some new skins to go with the new platform, but at its heart, this is still the same game that PSP fans know and love, down to the two-player battle mode. We're already chair-dancing in anticipation of "Shinin'" in the living room.

NOVEMBER RAIN

Hey, remember a few pages back when we talked about how September was originally the seventh month before the Gregorian Calendar changed it over to the ninth month? Similar story here, as November's etymology suggests that it should be the ninth month, but oh well, now it's the eleventh month. Too bad for you Roman fans!

DECEMBER

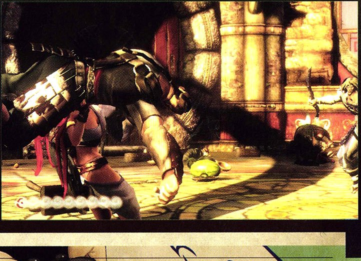


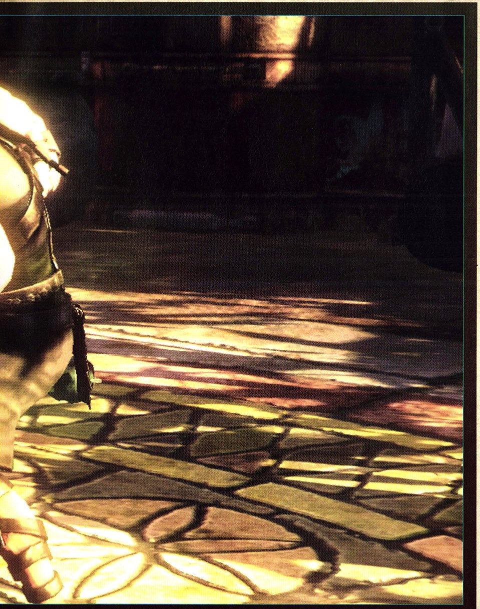
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Ninja Theory PLATFORM PS3

HEAVENLY SWORD

HOW DOES SHE GET SUCH HEAVEANLY HAIR?

Unfortunately, at press time, the guys over at Ninja Theory are too busy finishing this third-person action game. We've heard that one of the "synergistic processing elements" (SPEs—in other words, one of the chips that burn mad energy within the PS3) is dedicated solely to main character Nariko's hair—which is why it flows and flutters so luxuriantly as she zips around and fights dudes.





NINJA HYPOTHESIS

If Ninja Theory is an unfamiliar name, don't worry, this is its first game under that new name. It was formerly known as Just Add Monsters (who did *Kung Fu Chaos* for the Xbox back in 2003), and while that name was keen, the team wanted something with the word "Ninja" in it. To that end, we're going to make a magazine called "Ninja Law."

PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft PLATFORM PS2, PS3

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

After last year's well-received *King Kong*, Michel Ancel has gone back to his roots. In Rayman's new outing, the armless, legless, neckless guy will be facing off against a bunch of rabid rabbits (thus, "rabbids"), which, based on the game footage we've seen so far, kind of resemble the popular Teddy Scares stuffed toys.

This new version of Rayman's world will be more open than in prior games. Rayman can now tame certain creatures that he can then ride around on. In addition to speeding up Rayman's transport, these creatures help him approach things from different angles—for example, the spider lets Rayman walk up walls and on ceilings.

Rayman will need to have his dance steps in good shape, as executing smooth moves (different costumes determine the type of dance) can hypnotize the rabbids, making them easier to defeat. Ubisoft is mum on whether the motion-sensitive controls of the Wii will show up in the PS3 version of the game, but we're crossing our fingers.

PUB. Konami DEV. Blade PLATFORM PS2

KARAOKE REVOLUTION: AMERICAN IDOL

GIVE YOUR BEST; HAVE NO REGRETS AT ALL

Are you eager to have your singing brutally critiqued in the comfort of your own home? Look no further than *Karaoke Revolution: American Idol*, which brings 40 new songs to the *Karaoke Rev* format and adds "verbal feedback" from *American Idol* judges. In addition, expect the return of the KR Challenge, plus other *Karaoke Rev* standbys, such as the ability to import your own likeness into the game with the help of EyeToy.

1UP RADIO

Want to hear what our editors are excited about before your next issue arrives?

Tune in to 1UP Radio where the editors of 1UP, Electronic Gaming Monthly, Computer Gaming World, and the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine sound off on various topics each week. Each episode is filled with juicy tidbits and behind-the-scenes info that we couldn't fit in the pages of this magazine.

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1UP™ NETWORK

REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

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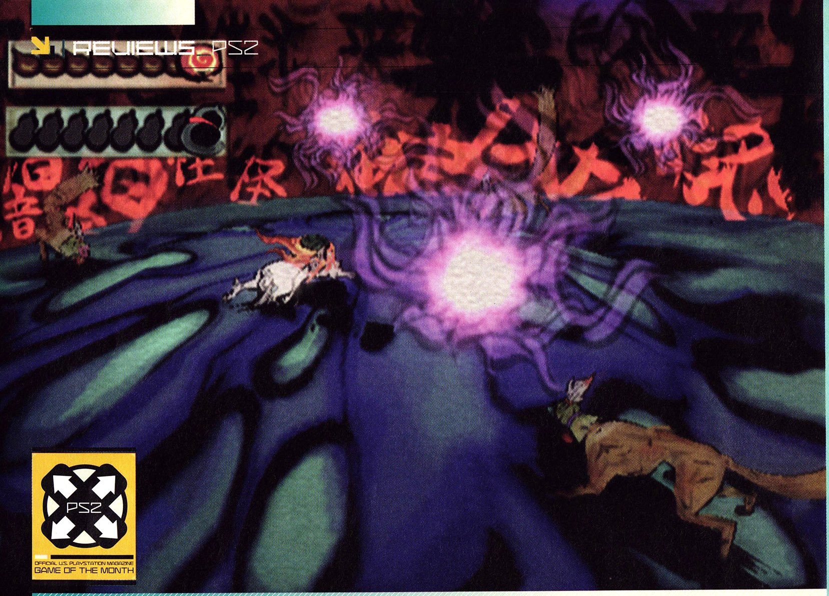
RATING KEY

In our new scoring system, a game that receives an *OPM* score of 10 is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 5 is merely average. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR SCORES?

You'll notice our reviews scores have gotten a little bigger, by about four times! Yes, at *OPM*, we've changed our rating system to go all the way to 10, allowing for half points. (See the new "Rating Key" to the left for more details.) Why the change? This way, when you see a review from any of the Ziff Davis publications (which includes *Electronic Gaming Monthly, Computer Gaming World,* and 1UP.com), it will be on the same scale.



OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

PUB. Capcom DEV. Clover Studios ESRB T MSRP $39.99

OKAMI

A BRUSH WITH GREATNESS

In the continuing argument about whether or not games are art, *Okami* should be entered into the Pros column as Exhibit A. Often when people describe a game as "amazing-looking," it's directly related to how closely the game resembles reality-based graphics, such as film. Even cel-shaded games are compared to their cartoon and anime counterparts. But *Okami*'s unique look goes a step beyond this, bringing legendlike tales to life through art and story in such a seamless fashion that I feel it's truly one of the most beautiful and complete games that I've ever played.

THE PEN IS MIGHTY

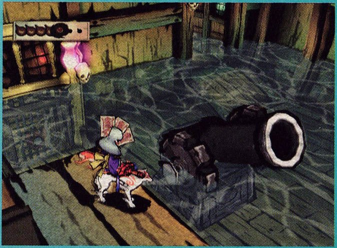
Okami begins by relating the legend of Shiranui. In a nutshell: The Japanese village of Kamiki has been terrorized by Orochi, an eight-headed beast who demands that a villager be sacrificed to him each year. When Orochi chooses the maiden Nami as his next victim, warrior Nagi decides that Orochi must be stopped. However, Orochi is too powerful, and soon Nagi is fighting for his life. Just as he is about to give up, a white wolf named Shiranui appears and helps Nagi in his battle. Together, they defeat Orochi, but Shiranui is mortally wounded. The village erects a statue in the wolf's memory.

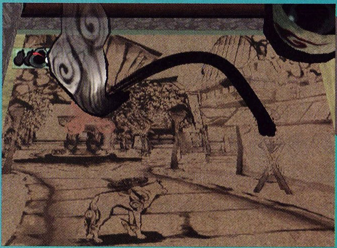
One hundred years later, which is when the gameplay begins, Orochi has been released from his prison, and the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu (whom you play) assumes the form of a white wolf and returns to the Earth to defeat Orochi and save the people. In order to do this, she needs to recollect the 13 spirits of the brush, who were scattered throughout the heavens upon the return of evil. Each spirit teaches Amaterasu a new brushstroke that has a different power. For example, one type of symbol makes the wind blow, while another lets you draw a moon to turn the sky to night.

> OKAMI'S UNIQUE LOOK BRINGS LEGEND-LIKE TALES TO LIFE THROUGH STORY AND ART IN A SEAMLESS FASHION.

Overall, the brushstroke system works amazingly well. To use the brush, you simply press R1, which freezes the scene, transforming it into a black-and-white drawing. After you've placed the brush at the desired starting point, simply press Square and use the left analog stick to make the shape you want. While it's tough to make any refined movements, each of the brush strokes is relatively broad, so for the most part, you'll have no problems. (The only stroke that I found at all troublesome was the cherry bomb, and my only difficulty there was getting it to land in the right place.) Your brush is fueled by your inkpots, which refill on their own after a brief period.

For the most part, the brush is relatively quick and simple to use,





BRUSH FIRE

Okami's unique painting technique is used for more than just combat. Here, a brushstroke is used to send the flame from the fiery streetlight to ignite an unlit torch farther down the road.

and pausing the game doesn't interrupt its flow. The one stroke that drove me crazy was the lily pad, which is used to cross water. Aside from the fact that it really seems like a wolf should be able to swim, having to pause to draw a lily pad for every single step I took got really tedious really quickly—especially when I had to make a return trip and redraw all the lily pads because they had disappeared again. In fact, it got so annoying that, eventually, I just quit using it—my health went down so slowly that it was usually easier to swim for it and then heal any damage I might have incurred afterward.

While brushstrokes can be used in combat, Amaterasu also has weapons—and, in many cases, they're a much more efficient means of getting through battles. There are plenty of random imps and demons scattered throughout the world, and they can usually be quickly dispatched with a few lashes from your holy rosary. These fights quickly get repetitive and boring, and there's not a lot of benefit to entering them, since all you typically gain is a few more yen. Fortunately, you can easily avoid them if you want, because the imps are visible as floating banners that hover above the landscape.

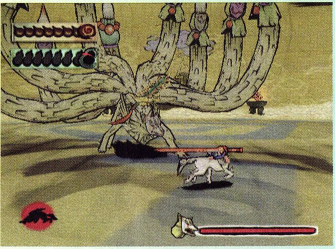
Most of the boss battles are, thankfully, more interesting; they require you to figure out which brushstrokes will exploit your enemy's weakness. And some of the best parts of the game are when you use the brush to help other characters out. For example, one of the central characters, Susano (a descendant of the warrior Nagi), is constantly showing off his skills. As he's swinging at the dummies and boulders in his way, you must jump in at the right moments and slash with your brush strokes so he believes in his abilities.

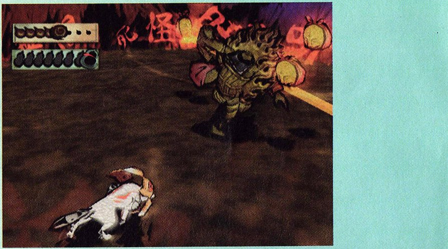
A HELPING HAND

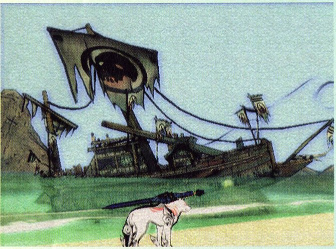
Aside from the art style, one of the most significant differences about *Okami* is the overall message. While most games have you seeking to defeat an opposing force, the character's motivation usually has to do with earning recognition or just the sheer joy of kicking ass. In *Okami*, however, your primary motivation is to heal the land and to help others. In fact, most of the humans you encounter in the game have no idea that it is you, Amaterasu, who is defeating the enemies around them.

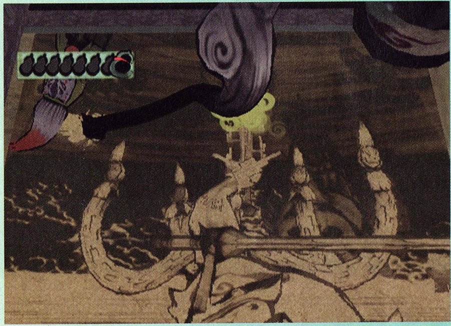
> ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IS THE MESSAGE.

As a way of reinforcing this concept, Amaterasu gets points for upgrades not through combat experience, but through regeneration and healing. Assist a villager in a quest, cause a barren patch of earth to bloom, feed the local animals—all of these acts will earn you praise, which can then be traded in for additional life bars or more inkpots.









Amaterasu does not speak, but she is accompanied by the chatty Issun, a tiny sprite who rides on Ammy's head and wants to learn all the strokes of the Celestial Brush. Issun is a good addition to the game: While *Okami*'s narration and story line hold true to the overall feel of a Japanese legend, his dialogue adds a levity and silliness that keeps things from getting too ponderous or melodramatic.

This is not a perfect game, though. For example, dialogue can go on for too long at times. And when the game changes between day and night, there's always a quick cut-scene that gets annoying—it can be skipped, but it would've been nice to be able to turn it off. Also, while the story is fairly linear, the game world itself is pretty sprawling and wide open, which means that sometimes it can be difficult to figure out exactly what you're supposed to do next.

Ultimately, the biggest issue that many people will have with the game is that it's simply not difficult. Your health is quite robust, you pick up plenty of health boosts along the way, and as a result, many "typical" gamers will probably be disappointed that there isn't more of a challenge.

But then, *Okami* is not a game for everyone. People who are fans of fast-paced action are likely to be bored after a few minutes—*Okami* is a game that's best suited for someone who enjoys exploring and isn't necessarily in a rush to get to the end. And all of the things that might bore John Q. Gamer are the very elements that could draw in someone who would normally not even think of picking up a controller.

It's rather ironic that companies are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to figure out how to make games that will appeal to nongamers, while in the meantime, this quiet gem hits store shelves without much of a fanfare. And that is both *Okami*'s greatest strength and greatest downfall: This is a game that's revolutionary in so much more than its art style, but the people who would most appreciate it probably won't even know that it exists.

> THIS IS A GAME THAT'S REVOLUTIONARY IN SO MUCH MORE THAN ITS ART STYLE.

But even so, that doesn't change the fact that *Okami* is great. Every element—the art style, the combat style, the experience, the dialogue—complements and reinforces the central story. So often games feel like they were put together in chunks or had elements shoehorned in without regard for how they fit in with the overall experience, but *Okami* feels like it was crafted as one whole. *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Despite some minor flaws, this beautiful game is an instant classic.

SCORE 9|10

WOLF MAN

ATSUSHI INABA ON BRINGING OKAMI TO LIFE

OPM What were some of the major hurdles to overcome in the development of *Okami*?

ATSUSHI INABA Establishing the game's style. We had key concepts in mind that piqued our curiosity: "A game about the beauty of nature," "a wolf as the main character," and "healing a broken world." However, realizing all those concepts in a great gaming experience is much easier said than done. We wavered back and forth [between] many different styles of gameplay, from simulation to a "communicating with humans" type of hybrid style. Before we knew it, over a year had passed, and we had very little to show for it. We nearly lost our way before going with the decidedly simple solution: an adventure game. It was a very pricey experiment. But one could say that we would not have realized this style had it not been for the massive amount of trial and error we put into the product. Each misstep ultimately led to a new discovery that made the final product even better.

The next hurdle was developing the Celestial Brush mechanic. Since we settled on the basic adventure genre, we needed something that felt new to push game design forward. A game that was built on fancy graphics just wouldn't be enough. The key concepts of the main character's being a god that could control the world, as well as heal it, gave us the hint we needed to create a system that matched the beauty of the game world. So we threw ourselves in a meeting room for two days and planned and bounced ideas off each other. The end result was to focus on the art, and therefore, the Celestial Brush came into being.

OPM Were you worried some people wouldn't understand the use of the Celestial Brush?

AI Using the brush to freely interact and modify a highly stylized world is something that anyone (gamer or not) would instinctually realize, so I wasn't too concerned. However, making the controls feel flexible yet easy enough to use was one area of concern. Did the brush respond well enough? Was it fast enough? Did it slow the action? All of these [issues] had to be taken into consideration when developing this system.

Some people on the team said there were too many Celestial Brush techniques and that it was ruining the game pacing. However, we ultimately decided that the Celestial Brush was what made the game what it was, so we went with a large number of techniques to give the player more freedom to interact. Even though I can't truly do justice to how cool the Celestial Brush system is through my words, just believe me when I say it is both easy and entertaining to use!

OPM Any particular reason why you used a wolf to tell this story as opposed to a human figure?

AI *Okami* is supposed to be a story in which the player interacts with a naturally beautiful world. We felt that, in our world, animals are the closest thing to nature. In Japanese, the word *Okami* has two separate meanings: "wolf" and "great god." Perhaps our ideologies of what a god is may differ from culture to culture, but we decided the majestic wolf would be our symbol for the Japanese goddess Amaterasu and designed the game around that character.

Also, when I was a college student, I read an art book titled *White Wolf: Living With an Arctic Legend* by Jim Brandenburg, who photographed arctic wolves over the backdrop of their severe and harsh winter surroundings. Ever since then, I knew that I wanted to create something that could feature such a majestic animal.

OPM What part of the game are you most proud of?

AI Probably that we were able to convey the beauty of the Japanese culture and history through the unique art style. If you look back on all the games that have come out of Japan in the past, there have been a variety of genres, but none of them really represented the Japanese culture and art styles of the past. I feel that, with *Okami*, we were able to re-create the magic of the past.

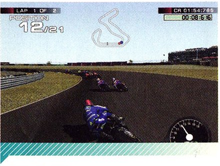
OPM An original demonstration of the game showed a very different graphic style. Why did you choose to move away from that?

AI The game went through several redesigns along the way. Initially, the main focus was on nature and not just showing off its beauty, but also [demonstrating] how severe and harsh it can be. We all agreed that to truly realize concepts like harsh climates and surviving severe conditions, we had to shoot for a more realistic style of graphics. However, during the many long hours of trying to get this concept up and running on current consoles, we realized that our goals were a bit too progressive, and that this generation of consoles didn't have the power to give us the best of both worlds. If we wanted to show the beauty of nature, we would have to do it stylistically. It was at that time the main designer was playing around with an old Japanese charcoal paint style and drew up a rough sketch of Amaterasu. Immediately, everyone in the team knew it was the right direction, and even the programmers agreed that from a technical perspective, this was a goal we could achieve with current hardware.

OPM Any chance we might see a sequel?

AI Currently, we do not have plans for a sequel. *Okami* was designed to be complete story with a proper ending. However, if the timing is right, it might be worth pursuing in the future.

> "THE GAME WENT THROUGH SEVERAL REDESIGNS ALONG THE WAY."



MOTOGP 4

ROCKETS IN YOUR POCKETS

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Namco Bandai
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

The *MotoGP* series on the PlayStation 2 has lost some of its original luster over the years, that's for sure. Once a jaw-dropping display of what the next gen should look like, the aging graphic engine is starting to look a bit stale. Especially in relation to THQ's series of games by the same name on that "other" system.

But don't let the slightly dated presentation—not to mention slightly dated driver rosters—keep you from playing what's one of the best motorcycle racers this year. Even against *Tourist Trophy* and its ridiculous collection of historic two-wheelers, *MotoGP 4* more than holds its own by making up for its lack of variety with a great career mode and intense racing.

Racing that would be much more exciting if it weren't for *MGP4*'s biggest downfall—a lack of speed. I don't know if it's a framerate issue or what, but when these bikes (all three classes of them) scream down the long straights, they don't seem to be going all that fast. And taking sharp corners? Sometimes it feels like you're coming to a complete stop. It's a real buzzkill.

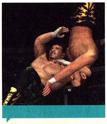
Still, though, more-authentic motorcycle racing will be hard to find on the PS2. Both beginners and experts can tweak *MGP4*'s settings to their liking while they learn to use the front and rear brakes the right way, or the proper lines to take for the most speed out of every single turn.

MotoGP 4 even has slight tuning options to it, allowing you to earn new parts for your ride throughout your career. It's silly that high-dollar teams wouldn't just buy these parts rather than make you compete in mundane license tests to earn them…but it's still a nice touch.

Take the great career mode, the interesting challenges, and solid online play, and you've got one excellent bike racer on your hands, even despite a few speed bumps here and there. | *Greg Sewart*

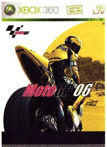
VERDICT The *MotoGP* series continues firing on all cylinders, outdoing even Polyphony Digital's *Tourist Trophy* in most respects.

SCORE 8.5|10



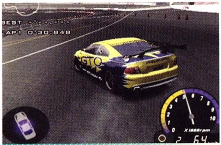
WHAT'S COOKIN'?

WWE fans will recognize Yuke's as the developer of most of THQ's good WWE games. The longtime wrestling developer may just be slumming it with the *D1* game—we're not really sure. But they should go back to giant, half-naked men embracing one another instead.



THE "OTHER" MOTOGP?

The "other" MGP series we mentioned resides on Microsoft's Xbox family of systems, courtesy of publisher THQ and developer Climax. It's always looked nicer than the PS2 version of *MotoGP* and, for a while there, played nicer as well. But *MotoGP 4* is debatably better than their latest rehash, *MotoGP 06*, on the Xbox 360.



D1 PROFESSIONAL DRIFT GRAND PRIX SERIES

SLIP-SLIDIN' AWAY

PUB. Mastiff DEV. Yuke's
ESRB E 10+ MSRP $39.99

Remember that montage in *The Fast and The Furious: Tokyo Drift* where the lead pretty boy keeps stalling out or sliding into crates/walls/other cars while he's learning the mechanics of exactly how to drift? Well, that's what this game's about. No, not the entire movie. Just that frustrating bit about not being able to drift.

Taking a turn in *D1PDGPS* is about as complicated as the title's anagram. Pull the e-brake, let off the gas, floor it, steer into the drift, pop the clutch for a bit of extra spin in the rear, and drive out. Go too slowly and the rear wheels will grip, causing you to drive into the infield. Go too hard and you'll either slam into the outside wall or just do a quick 360. Oh, and 80 percent of the time, the front tires will lose grip and you'll go into a four-wheel slide. Yeah, good times.

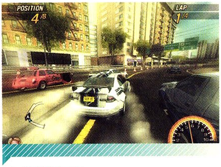
Oh, and you get graded on each drift, so there's no faking it on your way to the finish line.

On top of the frustrating interface and goals in the basic game, some idiot decided that the only way to get at the meat of the experience—the career mode—was to work your way through the most irritating set of tutorials ever. Seriously, the game needs to explain exactly how to play for more than an hour before you're actually allowed to play more than a two-minute test run. Sure, you can tackle the single-race modes, but the main portion of the game is effectively locked until you manage to complete the not-so-easy tutorial mode.

After suffering through it—if you even bother to get that far, and I wouldn't if I were you—the payoff isn't worth it. All the licensed rides and unlockable drifting videos in the world can't make this game that much fun—or worth the effort needed to even play it in the first place. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Realistic drift physics apparently don't equal a good time, especially when added to a frustrating—and mandatory—tutorial mode.

SCORE 2.5|10



FLATOUT 2

DESTRUCTION DERBY

PUB. Vivendi Universal DEV. Bugbear Entertainment
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

The original *FlatOut* has garnered a sort of cult following, despite generally lackluster reviews and, quite honestly, pretty shallow gameplay. *FlatOut 2* does a decent job of rectifying the latter, adding loads of cars, tracks, and a few different series to the career mode, but some of the original potholes haven't been completely smoothed over, either.

Career mode is pretty deep this time around, tasking you with both destroying competing cars and finishing high in the running order. Earn cash to upgrade your ride or buy a completely new set of wheels, and compete for the highest score in minigames that involve launching your driver through the windshield and into various obstacles.

The stars of the show—just like in the previous game—are the almost fully destructible environments and cars. By the end of each race, the course is so littered with debris and parts that the biggest challenge is making it through all the detritus without wrecking.

And, just like in the previous game, that's the game's biggest issue. The physics in *FlatOut 2* are touchy at best, bizarre at worst. The "floaty" feel of the cars makes them pretty unresponsive—and wildly unpredictable when colliding with the bits of wood, metal, and rubber strewn all over the place. Cruising to an easy win only to go careening off into a ditch thanks to hitting a wayward fender is a pretty common occurrence in *FlatOut 2*.

Despite its problems, though, I find myself enjoying *FlatOut 2*. It offers mindless fun along the lines of the *Burnout* series, but is different enough to be worth playing even if you've already beaten EA's franchise to the ground. Just don't expect greatness—only a fun, light, destructive romp that's best done in bite-sized chunks. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Features fun, arcadey action and an impressive amount of destruction—with a slightly irritating interface.

SCORE 7.5|10

THE 1UP SHOW

The Summer Season

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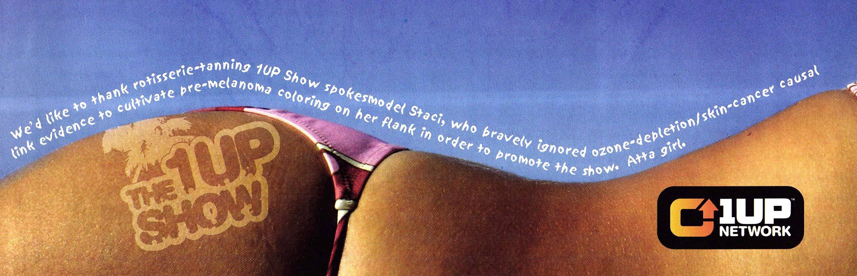

We'd like to thank rotisserie-tanning 1UP Show spokesmodel Staci, who bravely ignored ozone-depletion/skin-cancer causal link evidence to cultivate pre-melanoma coloring on her flank in order to promote the show. Atta girl.

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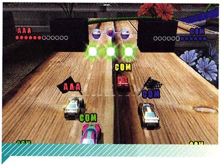


MICRO MACHINES V4

TOYS FOR LITTLE BOYS

PUB. Codemasters DEV. Supersonic Software

ESRB E MSRP $29.99

It's been 15 years since Codemasters released the original *Micro Machines* on the likes of the NES, Genesis, Game Boy, et al. A decade and a half later, the details have changed a bit, but the basic gameplay has remained the same. And that makes this series stale.

You can't accuse Codemasters and developer Supersonic Software of not trying, though. The tracks in *MMV4* are pretty clever, for the most part. And the sheer number of cars to collect is staggering—around 750. *MMV4* doesn't lack for content, that's for sure.

But the content just isn't exciting enough to keep most people playing. While there are 750 vehicles, they're grouped into specific classes, and cars within those classes handle mostly the same out on the track. And they're so bland-looking that you won't even want to waste any time admiring the contents of your extensive garage.

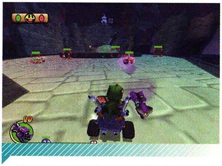
The whole game is pretty lackluster in the presentation department, really. Neither the cars nor the tracks really pop out during play. Everything's either too oversized or too tiny to be impressive.

The combat racing wears thin quickly, too. The limited weapons aren't the least bit spectacular, and the wildly swinging camera tends to move at the wrong times on every track. Falling to your doom is a pretty standard issue early on in your *Micro* career. With time and practice, you can get a handle on the tiny machines—but, honestly, you probably won't want to play that long.

Micro Machines V4 does a decent job of delivering what it promises: a slightly upgraded version of the same game Codemasters has been releasing since the early '90s. It's just really hard to be excited about that old game anymore. Most players will likely want to trade up from these dinky little cars to something more meaty—like, say, *FlatOut 2* or *Burnout 4*. *Micro Machines'* charm is officially gone. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT This was a great game...15 years ago. The new *Micro Machines* fails to offer anything new or exciting to an already stale series.

SCORE 3|10



PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY

PROOF SOME CHEAP CASH-INS CAN BE FUN

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Namco Bandai

ESRB E MSRP $29.99

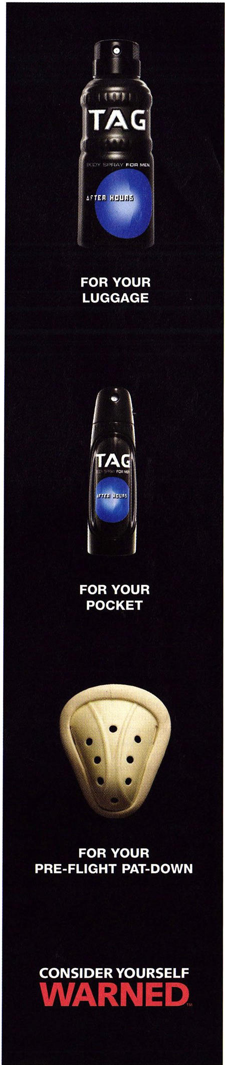
I can't get too angry with *Pac-Man World Rally*. It does make me mad, but not as hideously, blood-chillingly angry as most updates of my beloved childhood do. Namco Bandai probably started the game as just a way to milk a few dollars more from the never-complaining Man, but a mildly entertaining kart racer managed to sneak out of the process. As long as you're sticking to the racing, mild is the key word for the whole game. It's when you try out the battle mode, to "Battle in Pac-Style," that the bitter acid of garbage overcomes the mild flavor.

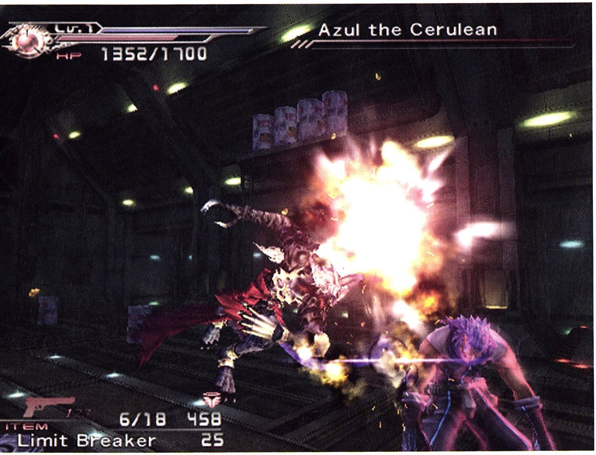
The racers include the familiar stable of ghosts and Pac-offshoots, as well as a few unlockable surprise characters. They're divided into three safe categories for any designer to choose: light, medium, and heavy. There are plenty of weapons, but the reality is that most of them are just slightly different bombs. And, ultimately, there's no real reason, even on the hardest difficulties, to do anything but the basics. It's the no-frills approach to kart racing: Accelerate as hard as possible, drop bombs as often as possible, and be sure to hit the shortcuts every time.

The track selection is boss. The actual design involves lots of basic-to-frustrating layouts, but each track is a visual treat. From the Funhouse's psychedelic layout to racing inside an arcade *Pac-Man*, there's a well-thought-out visual design that's executed interestingly. It feels like there's a *Pac-Man* roller coaster park out there somewhere that I don't know about, and each level is promoting one of the thrill rides. (Except the shooterlike Battle mode, which would be promoting getting mugged in the parking lot.) This is a neat game for kids or people who are chronically bad at racers, and it's not actually offensive to *Pac-Man* fans. | *Patrick Joynt*

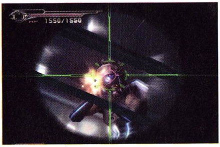
ADD A POINT If you have young children who need a new game or just suck at *Mario Kart*.

SCORE 5.5|10





HP 501/780
Dragonfly GL
6



HP 685/1700
Azul the Cerulean
4

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix ESRB T MSRP $49.99

FINAL FANTASY VII:
DIRGE OF CERBERUS
DOG DAY AFTERNOON FANTASY

For a while, there was a rumor that Square Enix was going to use the *Final Fantasy VII* brand to create a new third-person action game called *Cloud May Cry*. On paper, it kind of works—Cloud is an iconic *FF* character, and he has a big sword that could make for good melee-combat hijinks. The rumor evolved into a reality: Squenix was indeed making a third-person action title in the *FFVII* universe, but starring supporting character Vincent Valentine instead of Cloud. Again, in theory, that works. Vincent is cool and brooding, has a neat-looking red cloak, uses guns, and even transforms into big, bad monsters. So a *DMC*-style game could totally work. That is, if the developers actually ended up pulling it off. Which, in the case of *Dirge of Cerberus*, they didn't.

Dirge takes place three years after *FFVII* (and one year after *FFVII: Advent Children*) and focuses on some bad dudes from Deep Ground SOLDIER going after Vincent. While fighting them off, Vincent gets involved with the World Restoration Organization (headed up by Reeve/Cait Sith from *FFVII*) and learns a bunch of secrets about his crazy past that involve Lucrecia and Hojo and his time inside a giant vat of goo. As expected, there are a fair amount of in-game cut-scenes, though most of them aren't CG. The few CG scenes that do appear, though, are actually quite awesome-looking. Disappointingly, however, the story itself ends up being a bit on the melodramatic side.

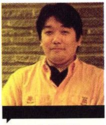
Gamewise, *Dirge* feels like the result of a group of car engineers getting together and trying to Frankenstein up an airplane. It's as though they said, "Hey, airplanes/shooters have wings/upgradeable weapons, so let's just bolt them on and add a rudder/double-jump—it'll definitely fly/play well." As a result, *Dirge* has many elements of better action games—there's just the small problem of those elements either not being executed well or not even meshing together. For example, the over-the-shoulder aiming perspective and the various guns and gun upgrades make the game seem very shooting-oriented. Yet the autoaiming mechanic (get the target within a large aiming area and a smaller reticule will then lock onto your target) only works sporadically—the time it takes to acquire a target is on the slow side, and firing blind usually causes you to miss or do too little damage. That means that fast enemies (like the weird robo-dogs) are a pain in the ass to shoot at—especially since they tend to get up close; the over-the-shoulder perspective works against you in that scenario. The melee attacks look like an afterthought, until you realize they're sometimes much more effective in inflicting damage than your guns. And even though there are loads of gun upgrades, side missions, and cool-looking enemies, the very drab levels kind of subtract from the fun of those other elements.

At its very best, *Dirge of Cerberus* is an average action game with RPG elements, nice ideas, and decent fan service. If it had been any other game, I'd probably have shelved it, but my *FF* fandom—combined with the general sense of morbid curiosity that the game fosters—compelled me to keep on playing. | *Thierry Nguyen*

PROS The CG looks damn cool, and on paper, the fusion of upgradeable guns, punching, leveling up, and *FFVII* fan service sounds cool...

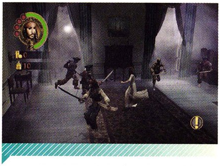
CONS ...but the actual action game itself shows what happens when RPG people try to make shooty-shooty games.

SCORE 6 | 10



MUSICMAN

Masashi Hamauzu, who will also be creating the music for the upcoming *Final Fantasy XIII*, was the composer of the *Dirge* score. Other games he has composed the music for include titles such as *Unlimited SaGa* and *Musashi: Samurai Legend*.



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: THE LEGEND OF JACK SPARROW

WE'RE NOT SURE HE DESERVED THAT

PUB. Bethesda Softworks DEV. 7 Studio

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

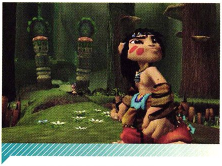
Ah, Captain Jack Sparrow—perhaps one of the most memorable characters in recent film history, played brilliantly by *21 Jump Street*'s Johnny Depp. Funny enough, this role seems to have changed Mr. Depp's opinion about taking roles that previously may have not been up to his personal standards. Take *The Legend of Jack Sparrow* for instance—Johnny Depp actually provided voice work for Jack Sparrow in the game while other stars from the movie did not contribute. It lends some major credibility to your enjoyment of the game if you're a fan of the film, even if Depp just phoned it in.

But that's not really the problem with this game. More than anything, it's a very rudimentary action game with some fairly sloppy gameplay mechanics and AI that's so bad it might as well have been programmed by some sort of weasel-like creature. Yes, it's that terrible. Not only do enemies often get caught on objects in the environment and run in place, but your own partner—which can either be Will Turner, Jack Sparrow, or one of the other characters from the film depending on what sequence you're in—often just stands there while waiting to be slaughtered by other pirates. Additionally, all of the puzzles are very basic and consist largely of the "go here and do this to open the door" variety; they also repeat within a level multiple times. It's just bad, which is really unfortunate, considering that the subject material would make for an excellent game.

The license isn't totally wasted. The story is actually handled in a fairly clever manner that's representative of Jack Sparrow's way of thinking, or lying, as it were. Most of the game is set in Sparrow's recollection of events that happened in and around the first movie, but this method of storytelling does get a little confusing later in the game—not really worth it for fans or those looking for some pirate booty. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Character models for main characters look good, Johnny Depp provides the voice for Sparrow
CONS Bad AI, action is basic and tedious

SCORE 5|10



BRAVE: THE SEARCH FOR SPIRIT DANCER

NO, THIS ISN'T TAK 4

PUB. SouthPeak DEV. VIS Entertainment

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

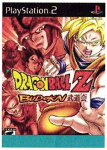
Brave: The Search for Spirit Dancer is, ostensibly, a wry little action-adventure platformer starring a Native American boy named Brave as he zips around trying to find the Spirit Dancer (a shaman to end all shamans) in order to take down a really evil and hairy primate. Yet in reality, *Brave* is basically a run-of-the-mill game that, at first glance, might be mistaken for a new installment in the *Tak* franchise.

It starts innocently enough. Brave wants to pass his warrior trial. So he beats up birds with a stick, throws rocks at a really perturbed bear, and does a fair amount of jumping and climbing. On occasion, he absorbs the spirit power of creatures to gain abilities (such as swimming in the water thanks to a fish, or climbing a tree courtesy of a squirrel) and reads about the ancient battle between the Spirit Dancer and the Wendigo (not to be mistaken for Sasquatch). Oops! The Wendigo comes back and tears through the village, so now Brave needs to find the Spirit Dancer—and so the game properly begins. At this point, Brave has more platforming mayhem, and his arsenal expands beyond a stick to include a tomahawk and a bow and arrow. He even gains the ability to become various creatures—such as a ghost bear, which should be featured in more games. There's also an incident early on where he possesses the body of a skunk. Oh, and as expected of a game featuring Native American lore, Brave rides a buffalo at some point.

Brave wants to be an exploration of Native American themes wrapped in *Lilo & Stitch*–inspired visuals, but it just ends up being a tour of typical gaming tropes, like the "desert level" and the oh-so-popular "ice level." *Brave's* problem isn't that it's terrible—it's that it's so generic (which is arguably a worse fate than outright incompetence). Despite its title, *Brave* is merely a meek little adventure. | *Thierry Nguyen*

VERDICT Rather than describing the game itself, "brave" more describes the thoughts of releasing such a generic and ultimately forgettable game into the crowded market.

SCORE 5|10



YOU AGAIN?

Super Dragon Ball Z marks the series' seventh—that's right, seventh—appearance on the PS2. Before that there were also two titles that came out on the PS1.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH...

The Japanese mech series *Yuusha* is marketed in North America under the name "Brave." Sadly, there is no relationship to this game, which could have benefitted from there some giant robots to help distinguish it from the rest of the pack.

CHAMPION
63
CHALLENGER

SUPER DRAGON BALL Z

DBZ GETS A LITTLE SOUL

PUB. Atari DEV. Namco Bandai

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

The great satirical weekly *The Onion* once ran this headline: "New Starbucks Opens in Restroom of Existing Starbucks"—poking fun at the overproliferation of the ubiquitous coffeehouses.

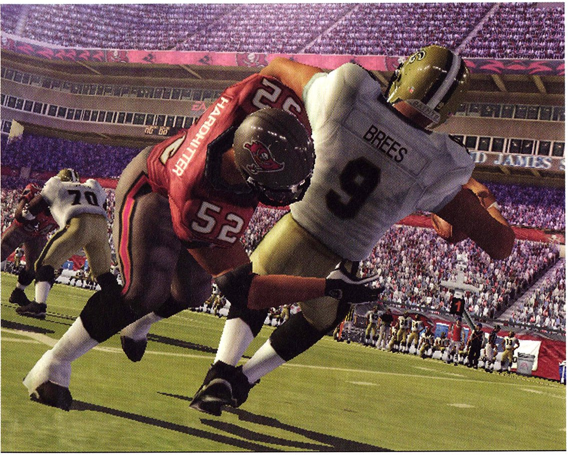
There's a lesson there for the *Dragon Ball Z* franchise. While the old standby of "they can make as many as they want, as long as they're good" applies, the downside is that a particularly special or standout title can get lost in the mix. Atari should be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

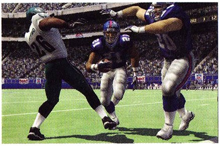
So along comes *Super Dragon Ball Z*, based on the arcade game, quietly appearing in the middle of the summer, feeling like just another *DBZ* title. But it's not. While not extraordinary in terms of fighting games, it *is* extraordinary in terms of the *DBZ* series. Designed in large part by Noritaka Funamizu, a former *Street Fighter* producer, *Super DBZ* is a fine attempt to legitimize *DBZ* as a genuine fighting game—one that can stand up to the *Soul Calibur*s of the world.

The *Soul Calibur* reference isn't a casual one: Namco Bandai was involved in *Super DBZ*'s development, and the game borrows many conventions from its more experienced cousin. Choose your champion from 18 possible fighters (13 at first, including Majin Buu), pick your arena, and then—after a longish load time—fight in a best-of-three match. While button-mashing will get you through many of the fights (as it can in the *Soul Calibur* series), *Super DBZ*'s combat is considerably more complex—and, subsequently, better—than previous *DBZ* titles. The combo lists are long, and the ki meter provides access to whole new swaths of special moves. The arenas are large and destructible (featuring columns, trees, etc.), and going Super Saiyan is an especially dramatic affair, much in the spirit of *Street Fighter II*. Several additional modes, such as a versus option, round out a robust fighting experience. | *Tom Byron*

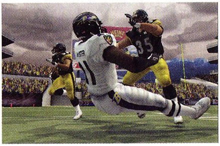
YOU WIN! The *DBZ* series goes legit in this fine attempt to be like a real fighting game.
K.O.! It still has a way to go before it can replace *Soul Calibur*, but it's off to a good start.

SCORE 8|10





Hardhitter



PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Tiburon ESRB E MSRP $49.99

MADDEN NFL 07

UP YOUR PANCAKE COUNT

San Diego Chargers fullback Lorenzo Neal leads the way, filling the hole to plug the gap, stopping Baltimore Ravens middle linebacker Ray Lewis (last year's *Madden* cover guy) in his tracks, and springing tailback LaDainian Tomlinson for a two-yard run up the middle. It's not only a first down late in the game, but also the most gratifying *Madden* experience I've had in years.

That might sound as ridiculous as my leading this story with a fullback, but it's not. I was the one who delivered the Neal block via Lead Blocker—the new *Madden* feature that, unlike last year's passing cone, actually revolutionizes gameplay. Lead Blocker encourages a ground game; straight blocks—or cut blocks (watch the knees) if you're outsized—turn the defender away from the play. Lead Blocker also gives you a new appreciation for what gigantic offensive linemen and fullbacks—the dudes in the trenches—do on a football field. And now, checking the number of pancakes in the stats means something, because you can tally them yourself—which offers a completely new way to play the game, putting the spotlight on the guys that do the dirty work and, until now, got little glory.

When you take control of the ball carrier, the Highlight Stick (the right analog stick) lets you do more than just bull forward or step back. The advanced arsenal of jukes and cutbacks that are available depend on the skill and style of the runner. When in the grasp of a defender, you tap X to break the tackle while the defender taps X to take you down, and the fastest fingers win. I could do without button mashing at this or any point in the game. With Shaun Alexander on the cover and history as a barometer, you knew EA Tiburon would refine the running game, but Lead Blocker is extremely effective for pass blocking. Being able to take out that advancing defensive end or blitzing linebacker before taking control of the quarterback changes strategy.

Other enhancements include onside kicks with analog kicking, but booting field goals proves way too easy—you shouldn't be able to routinely drill 50-yarders. There are also a ton of boring angles of the NFL that get covered in the game—for example, pricing the foam fingers in your stadium and dealing with contracts—but Lead Blocker breathes more pure football fun into *Madden*.

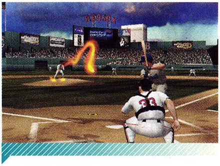
Oh, and about that game—I ran Brian Billick's Ravens into the ground for an easy victory. Gave the ball to LT, stayed true to the run, kept the chains and the clock moving. I established the run, which put me in position to win. Simple. Effective. Realistic. Gratifying. | *Patrick Mauro*

VERDICT Lead Blocker rejuvenates the *Madden* experience.

SCORE 9|10

FAME GAME

Last year, games in superstar mode felt too similar to games in franchise mode, so now if you need that single-player story mode in a sports game, you create your player and play only that position in the hope of becoming a Hall of Famer. Play whatever position you want—wide receiver, defensive end, even kicker. I created a punter, signed with the Bucs, lived a boring existence, but couldn't make it to Canton. Then again, if former Oakland Raider great Ray Guy isn't in, then I shouldn't be in, either.



MLB SLUGFEST 2006

ON-FIRE BASEBALL FOR FIRE SALE–CHEAP

PUB. Midway DEV. Midway
ESRB E MSRP $19.99

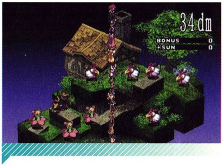
Let's all get on the same base here right at the beginning—there aren't any improvements from 2004's *SlugFest: Loaded* here worth dropping normal retail on. The graphics are the same, the designers pared the actual gameplay modes down to the bone, and there's no online gameplay. It's not even worth picking up for an up-to-date roster list, because it ships with a roster updated in February. Midway, in its finite wisdom, is shipping *SlugFest 2006* at a wallet-friendly 20 bucks instead of the normal retail price. Presumably, they conjured some strange licensing magic to get this made even though Take Two picked up the semiexclusive MLB license last year.

No matter how badly your chosen team may perform, the franchise mode is the real loser in this game; it apparently took two years for Midway to strip it down to a shivering, naked "season mode." This is the baseball season with 52 games and no trading allowed, which seems to be how they do it in the city of Bargain Game, U.S.A. I guess it's better to have a watered-down version of a key feature than to lose it entirely, since it's at least possible to play this surreal version of a season of baseball. There's no option to play online at all. The create-a-player and create-a-team modes don't make up for it. They're actually just cruel jabs at the loss of the full franchise mode.

That said, if you want to play some arcade baseball, the core gameplay still sports the easy-to-control and fun-to-watch stylings of *Loaded*. If you don't want to hunt down a (probably beat-up) copy of *2006*'s predecessor, or if a roster uselessly updated early this year is worth the stripped-down feature set to you, *2006* is only 20 bucks. And those are the real players you'll see—even though they'll look like death on that old graphics engine. | *Patrick Joynt*

VERDICT If this game had online play and were a PSP title, we'd be pretty pleased. But it doesn't, it's not—and we're not.

SCORE 4/10



DISGAEA 2: CURSED MEMORIES

AND THE DÉJÀ VU TO GO WITH THEM

PUB. NIS America DEV. Nippon Ichi
ESRB T MSRP $49.99

It's become common knowledge that the MMORPG is the greatest time sink in gaming. Yet how quick we are to dismiss the days of old, when hundreds of hours spent slogging through menus and monsters by yourself in an RPG was just as bad. Enter *Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories,* which continues Nippon Ichi's line of incredibly involved strategy-RPGs. New hero Adell is a good guy, a change from the first game's nasty wannabe-demon-lord Laharl—but Adell's forced to cross to the dark side in order to return the daughter of Overlord Zenon. Plenty of humorous, grid-based fun is along the way, including the return of favorite friends and foes (including those "doodical" Prinnies).

As the sequel to one of 2003's sleeper hits, you'd think there'd be lots more to *Disgaea 2*. But you'd be wrong. Aside from a better use of color, there's the same old leveling to be had. The best improvement over the original is that stacking a tower of characters (a vital, if goofy, tactic to get around the map) retains everyone's ability to attack, letting you inflict even more pain than usual. Otherwise, all the systems, units, and rules are more than a little familiar. Of course, if it ain't broke, don't fix it—but after three years and two superior games in the same genre, forgive us for expecting some sort of new approach.

The plot doesn't have much spunk, either: Making your way up through the demon-world ladder was a fresh twist in the original game, but performing naughty deeds as a brawny do-gooder makes things feel a little uninspired. And plentiful Saturday-morning-anime clichés make it rather groan-worthy. Still, Nippon Ichi is a force to be reckoned with as it continues to prove its mastery of the console strategy-RPG—no matter how often you think you're getting sick of moving stumpy characters around a swamp and watching their numbers go up, you're bound to jump right back in. Just alert friends and family when appropriate. | *Ray Barnholt*

VERDICT It feels like we've already had enough tactical role-playing for this decade.

SCORE 6.5/10

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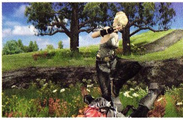
GAME OF THE MONTH



PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Namco Bandai ESRB T MSRP $39.99

TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

TEKKEN IT TO THE STREETS (PLEASE KILL ME NOW)

The first review I ever got paid for writing was for *Tekken 2*. At the time, the heated battle in the fighting-game arena (if you will pardon the expression) was over the relative merits of the *Tekken* controls versus those of *Street Fighter*. Me, I was a *Tekken* man from day one. Something about each button controlling an individual limb just made far more sense to me than the less intuitive control scheme of the *SF* series.

So it was with great fondness that I fired up *Dark Resurrection* to find all of my favorite characters jammed into this tiny little package—plus an extra two (fairly underwhelming) new characters to bring the grand total to 36. And holy crap, they look really fantastic. The game manages to bring much of the subtle expressions and environmental detail that's characterized the most recent *Tekken* games onto the portable screen.

Also welcome is the vast variety of game types, offering more than your basic story mode (a bit light on Namco's typically stunning CG, alas) and a surprisingly relevant arcade mode (more on that later). You've also got the tourney-style Tekken Dojo, a series of attack modes (time attack, command attack, etc.), and even a variety of bonus games—including the ever-popular Tekken Bowl.

It's all very, very solid, but perhaps the biggest surprise was what a good fit the arcade mode is for a portable system. The ability to earn gold, gear, and higher rankings in a mode that would normally be considered a fairly inconsequential time killer makes all the difference in the world. It's nice to be able to squeeze in a few matches on the bus and maybe unlock a really ridiculous hat or move a step up the ranking ladder. However, it remains to be seen whether the online ranking and ghost-data database (not yet active as of this writing) will provide enough of an incentive to really max out your characters.

Though it would have been nice to be able to actually conduct matches online, ad hoc wireless play is the next best thing: It's surprisingly quick, with absolutely no noticeable lag. You can even play a match with a friend who doesn't own the game via the generous game sharing.

The only real problem I find with *Dark Resurrection* is one of comfort: If you've played a lot of *Tekken*, chances are you play overhand, using two fingers to hit buttons instead of trying to hit, say, Square and Circle simultaneously with your mutant, triple-jointed thumb. (You freak.) This is literally painful on the PSP, however, and furthermore requires finding a stable surface to be able to play this way with any precision...thereby practically negating the game's portability.

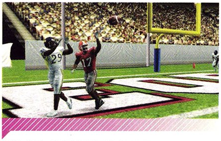
If you can deal with that handicap, *Dark Resurrection* is a more than worthy successor to the *Tekken* throne. | *Joe Rybicki*

FIGHT Pantloads of content, characters, unlockables, and extras; that familiar *Tekken* formula; looks great
FLIGHT Essentially the same game as *Tekken 5*; all but impossible to play PSP overhand

SCORE 9|10

ROSTER UPDATE

Though *Dark Resurrection* is certainly very similar to *Tekken 5*, it does have a slightly different cast. In addition to the new characters Dragunov and Lili, the game also reintroduces Eddy Gordo as a separate character, and brings back Armor King as a separate character from your regular vanilla King.



NCAA FOOTBALL 07

COLLEGE FOOTBALL FUN ON THE GO

PUB. Electronic Arts DEV. EA Tiburon

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

It happened! A PSP sports game that loads fast and plays almost like the PS2 version! *NCAA Football 07* bursts on the handheld scene complete with the most relevant additions—jump the snap, onside kicks, monster playbooks—from its excellent PS2 equivalent.

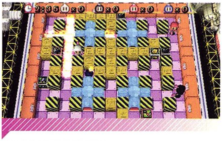
As with most PSP games, you'll initially be reaching for the right analog stick that's not there. Fortunately, EA Tiburon did a tremendous job of creating the illusion of a second analog stick by combining the L button with the face buttons. Big hits, slide protection, linebacker shifts—what you control with the right stick on the PS2, you can intuitively command on the PSP. The pause menu provides a FAQ option with accessible images of all controls, which offers an easy way to see how they differ from the PS2 without referring to the manual or deciphering on the fly. In fact, pump fakes are about the only control missing on the PSP.

As in the PS2 version, the new-to-this-year Turn the Tide feature helps make *NCAA* all the more lifelike. I played as Notre Dame taking on USC in Los Angeles (in the battle for the Jeweled Shillelagh). After going up 17-0 early, I was driving—only to botch the option, fumble, and watch the defense return it the distance. On my heels from there, I fell behind late in the third quarter, never to regain momentum. Or the lead. Damn! But this feature does add an excellent element of suspense. Dynasty mode only lasts 10 seasons, but it features recruiting during the year, plus Bowl rankings, the Heisman race, and all that. There isn't a PSP Campus Legend mode, but it hardly kills the fun. You don't need a single-player story mode off the field to enjoy the college gridiron.

The only major gameplay issue I had was that running the ball between the tackles felt significantly less realistic than on the console, making you break runs outside—whether the play calls for it or not. Glitches that plagued *Madden*'s PSP debut last year—delays after selecting plays, inexplicably random crashing—were, thankfully, nowhere to be seen. Let's hope quick-loading handheld sports games are here to stay. | *Patrick Mauro*

GOOD Load times and controls excellent by PSP standards
WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE PSP/PS2 interface

SCORE 8|10



BOMBERMAN

IN WHICH A BOMB IS A GOOD THING

PUB. Konami DEV. Hudson Soft

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

If part of the definition of a "classic" is a game that holds up over time, then *Bomberman* should probably have its own Hall of Fame. Like *Tetris* (and checkers and chess), *Bomberman* gameplay has remained essentially great over its 20-plus years—no matter the platform or graphics.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the PSP version is already one of the best games on Sony's handheld. While that may not be saying much—there simply aren't that many "best games" on the PSP—it's an important point. *Bomberman* is fun, it's always been fun, and the PSP is a strong showcase for the game.

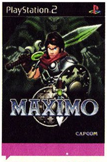
In most regards, *Bomberman* PSP plays like the classic game—our hero strategically places bombs on the playfield to destroy barriers, enemies, and collect power-ups—with some notable, and largely welcome, differences. The game's in 3D and is awash in crisp, colorful images. Surprisingly, the switch from 2D—while probably necessary to "modern" it up—can cause the minor irritation of hiding the escape hatch, which can lead to accidentally blowing it up and ending the game. But the more significant change is the way power-ups are handled. Instead of using them only for the duration of a level, you can collect and bank them for use in later levels, including the boss battles (except for the "extra time" power-up). This is a godsend, especially since you can use power-ups on the fly.

Bomberman can be a tough game, though. Of the seven worlds, I found myself repeating a lot of levels to bank more power-ups because I couldn't get past particular bosses. The game has an autosave feature, but be a little careful on the level-start screens: You can't save multiple games—you either save over the current game or don't, so you run the danger of having to start a world all over.

Of the 50-odd versions of *Bomberman* over the years, the basic formula is still intact. This is a good thing, and the PSP version should feel right at home. | *Tom Byron*

DA BOOM Additions actually make this classic better.
DA BANE Can be really tough at times, especially the bosses.

SCORE 8|10



TRY INSTEAD

Want a better *Ghosts 'n Goblins* update? Try *Maximo* for the PS2. Or *Demon's Crest* for the Super NES. Or *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* for the Genesis. Seriously, anything but this.

MULTI-BOOM

A *Bomberman* game can't be truly a *Bomberman* game without multiplayer. The PSP version doesn't disappoint with its two four-player ad hoc modes: Battle, basically a last-man-standing game with up to 20 stages; and game sharing, allowing four players off one UMD.

ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

HOPEFULLY, IT'S "ULTIMATE" AS IN "LAST ONE EVER"

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins isn't much of a videogame. But as a "How masochistic are you?" personality quiz, it's unmatched.

- Do you believe in old-school gaming? (Read: "archaic.")
- Do you feel that controls should hinder players, rather than help them?
- Do you think games should be dark and gritty, even when that means you can barely see the graphics?
- Do you think that losing should be the game's fault rather than your own?

If you shouted "YES!" to all of the above, *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* is perfect for you. If, on the other hand, the game described above sounds about as fun as having your hands smashed with a hammer, consider *UGG* a trip to the hardware store.

Admittedly, *UGG* does as advertised: It remakes the series as a portable 2.5D side-scroller that draws on its own heritage. The problem is that it's completely indiscriminate about what it drags into the present.

Sure, it's fun to see Arthur rapid-firing lances at Red Arremers, and you won't complete the game by simply fighting the final boss, of course. But Arthur's stiff controls make the bad guys far more mobile than he is, gimmicky traps will require the basest kind of memorization to surmount, and it's practically impossible to hang on to your preferred weapons. We put up with these issues in 1986, because platform gaming was still young. In 2006, though, Capcom should know better.

The shame of it is that *UGG* could've been so much better; Capcom pulled off the trick of reinventing a 20-year-old game for the PSP with style just a few months ago with *Mega Man Powered Up*. The key: refinements, additions, and extras—all of which are missing here. It takes more than a polygonal facelift to bring an old game up to date, and once you get past the nostalgic satisfaction of fighting evil in heart-print boxers, you just might realize the past wasn't really all that great after all. | *Jeremy Parish*

THE BAD Oh...not actually very modern
THE UGLY The graphics, the controls, the level design

SCORE 4|10

[Hugo Weaving, Natalie Portman]

V FOR VENDETTA

FREEDOM FORCE

by john scalzi

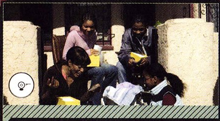
V for Vendetta is based on the graphic novel written by the iconoclastic Alan Moore who, during the production of this film, was apparently so irritated by something one of the producers said that he ordered his name taken off the final cut. I won't gainsay Moore's decision—you know, it's his life—but I will say that I think it's a shame his name's on a crap movie like *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and not on this one. Unlike that waste, this film is both excellent in and of itself and as a reasonably faithful adaptation of Moore's tale.

So with Moore "officially" not in the picture, we can chalk that excellence up to the equally iconoclastic Wachowski brothers. Their screenplay (perhaps as atonement for the mishmashy mess of the *Matrix* sequels) hits all the high notes of Moore's tale of one masked man's struggle against a dystopian, racist, and totalitarian Britain—while making as few concessions to Hollywood as possible. The Wachowskis sat out directing—their longtime colleague James McTeigue, who clearly was paying attention, handles that—but their touch is as much in evidence as Moore's, and in line with it.

And what are Moore and the Wachowskis trying to say? Mostly that freedom is hard work, and that freedom given up through fear is very rarely returned. Yes, the story has resonance at the moment (for its outlines, not its specifics). Personally, I think it's a very good thing to find it in something passing itself off as mainstream entertainment for the action-movie crowd.

Whether that crowd listens is another matter entirely, but getting the message out there is half the battle. Well done to McTeigue, the Wachowskis, and to Moore—whether he wants the credit or not.

SCORE 9|10



AKEELAH AND THE BEE

Keke Palmer, Laurence Fishburne

This excellent film looks at the freakish and insular world of kids' spelling bees (which, to be fair, is no more freakish and insular that the world of, say, high-school football—and at least these kids learn how to spell) through the eyes of a girl from the wrong part of town. This film, like its main character, is smart, engaging, surprising...and the best film of this kind since *Searching for Bobby Fischer*. Yes, that's high praise.

SCORE 9|10

SILENT HILL

Radha Mitchell, Sean Bean

Silent Hill is one of those rare videogame-derived films not made by Uwe Boll, which means that it's not hobbled by that man's feculent cinematic touch. It is, in fact, directed by Christophe Gans, the crazy Frenchman who directed the loopily fun *Brotherhood of the Wolf.* And in this film as well as that, Gans offers something worth looking at. But does Gans deliver something worth listening to as well? Sadly, no. As with just about every other videogame movie made, *Silent Hill* falls down dead when it comes to the details of story, dialogue, and acting. It's not that none of those three exists here—there's quite a lot of plot—it's just that none of it works in the context of the movie. For all this movie's visual style, the sound and fury of it signify nothing.

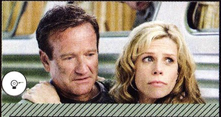
SCORE 4|10

BRICK

Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Lukas Haas

If you ever wanted to know what the results would be like if someone jammed a bunch of teenagers in a box, kept them away from all forms of media except the film noir of the 1930s and '40s, and then released every one of them into the wild on a Saturday night, then boy, oh boy, is this ever the film for you. This high-school murder mystery is mannered to the edge of parody, but it clicks against all odds. A future cult hit.

SCORE 8|10

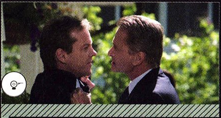


RV

Robin Williams, Cheryl Hines

This is the sort of movie that used to star Chevy Chase, but god only knows where Chevy Chase has gotten to recently...and, frankly, no one seems to miss him. Instead, we've got Robin Williams jamming his movie family into an RV and having hilarious hijinks involving raccoons and septic tanks. Yes, you'll be reasonably entertained. You'll also be sad that Robin Williams has Chevy Chase's career. Look what it did to Chevy Chase.

SCORE 6|10

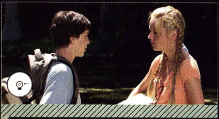


THE SENTINEL

Michael Douglas, Kiefer Sutherland

Someone's trying to kill the President of the United States, and it's up to Michael Douglas' Secret Service agent to stop them—that is, if he can get them to believe he's not the one attempting the assassination. This thriller sets up all the plot points and checks them off efficiently: nothing too surprising, but not a bad way to waste a couple of hours, either. And Kiefer Sutherland's on hand to do that squinty thing of his. Love that.

SCORE 7|10

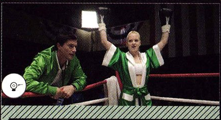


HOOT

Logan Lerman, Luke Wilson

I feel sorry for Carl Hiaasen, who's one of the funniest writers in the world right now, but who's had rotten luck with film adaptations of his work (remember *Striptease*?). *Hoot* adapts his novel about three kids trying to save some owls from conscienceless developers; somewhere along the way, Hiaasen's wit and charm got dredged out of the story, and now it just sits there, waiting for someone to do something interesting. Better luck next time, Carl.

SCORE 4|10



SCARY MOVIE 4

Anna Faris, Craig Bierko

The *Scary Movie* franchise has become kind of like a live-action version of *Mad* magazine—and like that magazine, the parodies of more popular films are generally only as funny as your tolerance for the word "blech." This time, we get send-ups of *War of the Worlds, Saw, The Village*, and so on. And if you don't find one joke funny, wait five seconds—another will be along. It is what it is. You know if it's for you.

SCORE 8|10

PRIVATE PROPERTY

THE SHAGGY DOG

Tim Allen, Robert Downey Jr.

Bitten by a 300-year-old dog (that's 2,100 in dog years, har-har-har), Tim Allen becomes a dog over the course of this film, because...oh, I don't know, maybe because Disney wants to make sure CGI-effects people in L.A. can make their mortgages this month. That's really sweet of Disney, but the only reason you want to watch this is to see Robert Downey Jr. as a mad scientist. Dude, he was totally sober when he made this. Really.

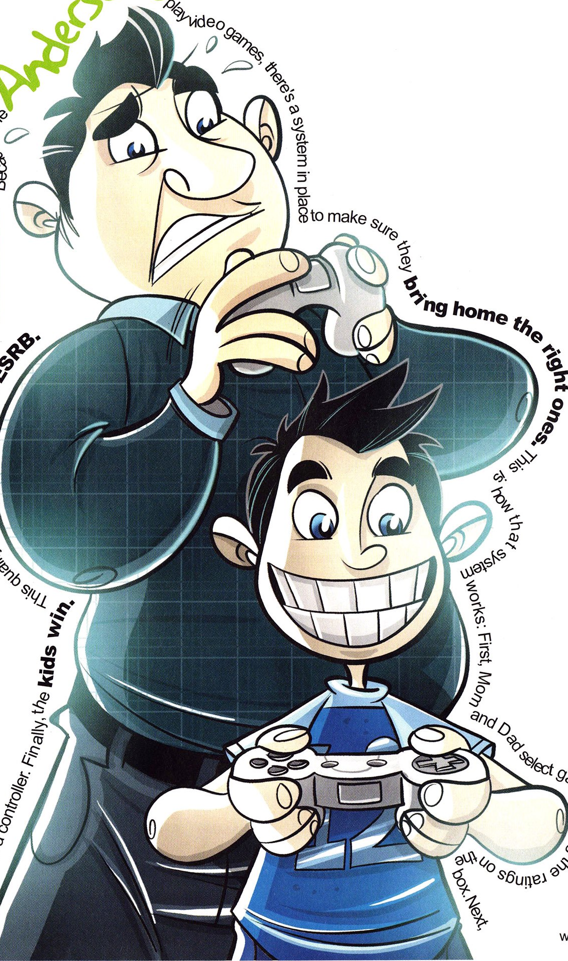
SCORE 5|10

DVD RELEASE

August 1
The Shaggy Dog
V for Vendetta
August 8
Brick
August 15
Hoot
RV
Scary Movie 4
August 22
Silent Hill
August 29
Akeelah and the Bee
The Sentinel

UMD RELEASE

August 1
V for Vendetta
August 22
Silent Hill



Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Next, everyone gets a controller. Finally, the **kids win.** This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

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REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

90

LARA'S RETURN

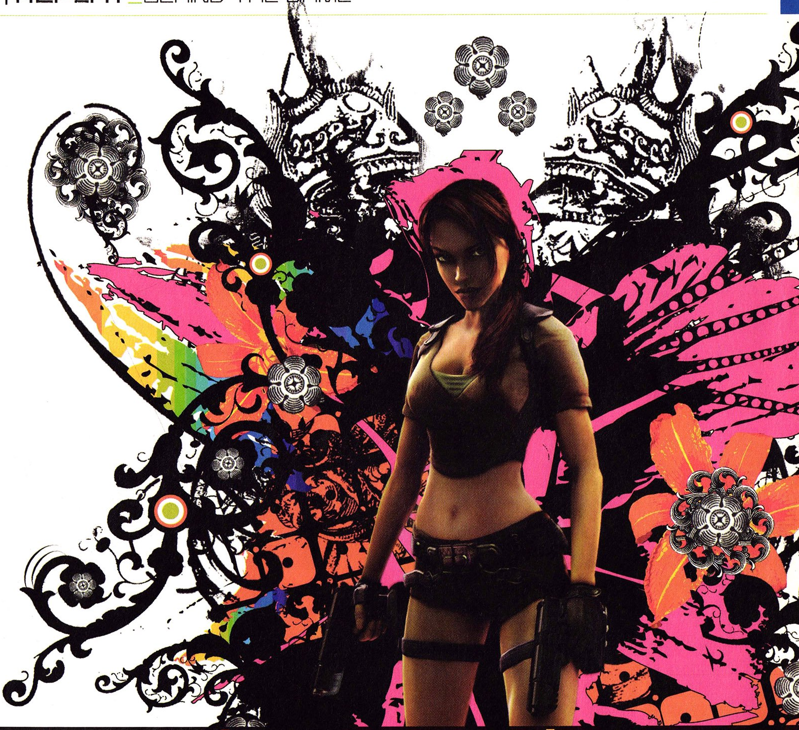
HOW TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND GOT IT RIGHT

INSIDE

94 STILL HANGING
Did you know that *EverQuest Online Adventures* is still running? We examine the reasons behind this MMORPG's continued success.

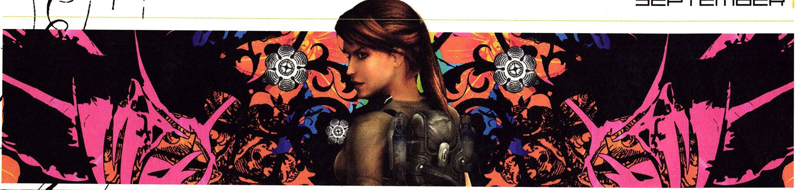
96 FORGOTTEN GEM: KLONOA
In an era when 2D platformers were falling out of fashion, this "2.5D" masterpiece leapt into our hearts.

97 PS1-DERLAND
Jeremy takes a critical look at the extinction of the aforementioned 2D platformer.



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

THE SECRETS BEHIND LARA´S TRIUMPHANT RETURN



Photos: Cody Pickens

Inside the heads of Riley Cooper (left) and Morgan Gray are the brains behind *Tomb Raider: Legend*.

Over the years, it's seemed the only artifact that's managed to elude Lara Croft is her lost glory. Bad games released on a yearly basis made this onetime industry darling—star of movies, magazine covers, and even U2's Popmart tour—a laughingstock.

That is until Eidos ripped Lara away from creators Core Design and decided to give Crystal Dynamics a shot at resurrecting Lady Croft's reputation.

Mission accomplished.

We sat down with Crystal Dynamics producer Morgan Gray and lead designer Riley Cooper to discuss the past, the future, and the anatomy of a comeback.

I OPM Now that *Tomb Raider: Legend* has finally hit retail, are you happy with the reaction?

I Crystal Dynamics We're very happy with the fan reaction. It's ultimately how we judge the quality of our games: Did the people we make it for appreciate it? So that they've been as happy as they have [been] has been really rewarding.

I OPM Why do you think this game has been so well received? What did you do that made people love Lara again?

I CD I think it's just that, from day one, we set out to be true to Lara and to create an experience that put her back where she excels—in the tombs. Of course, getting off the grid system of the past six *Tomb Raider*s was very important as well. The physics gave us room to do some new things with level design. There were a lot of things [we concentrated on], but from day one, it was [our intention] to stay true to the first two games in the franchise and bring *Tomb Raider* up to modern gameplay standards.

I OPM Is there any particular level or section of the game you're most proud of?

I CD The very first physics-based puzzle that takes place in the heart of the first tomb. It uses this relatively new game system to re-create the classic *Tomb Raider*

RÉSUMÉ

| MORGAN GRAY

Tomb Raider: Legend (PS2, 2006) – Producer

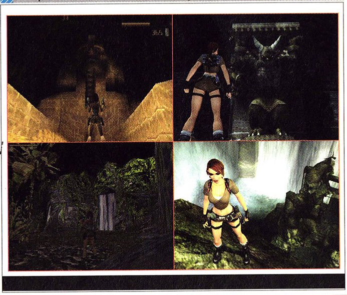
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown (PS2, 2003) – Lead Designer

Secret Weapons Over Normandy (PS2, 2003) – Project Coordinator

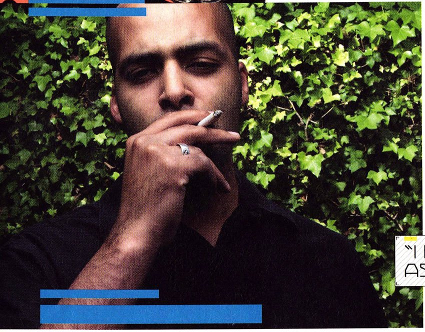
Star Trek Bridge Commander (PC, 2002) – Additional Design / Story

Star Wars: X-Wing Alliance (PC, 1999) – Level / Scenario Design

Star Wars: X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter—Balance of Power (PC, 1997) – Mission Design



Check out some of these scenes from the first *Tomb Raider*, compared to similar scenes from *Legend*. How far she's come!



room-filling puzzle. The physical aspect is very kinetic, and Lara applies force to it in a fun way.

| OPM Is there anything in the game our readers may have missed on their first playthroughs?

| CD Most of them probably didn't get all the rewards and their associated unlockables. There are some helpful gun upgrades and pretty cool outfits if you do—and they're fun to find. Some of [the associated] puzzles are the harder ones in the game.

| OPM *Legend* feels a tad short compared to earlier games in the series. Is there anything you hoped to add to *Legend* but couldn't due to time constraints?

| CD The length of the game is always a challenge, given the art fidelity we go for. That much custom content for every corner of the game, let alone every level, means that everything takes a long time to build—and then a long time to iterate—as new technology comes online. And people want a good-looking game. We had a couple of physics puzzles that we were excited about that we weren't able to get in. Look for lots of physics-based fun in the next games.

| OPM Is a sequel inevitable? Anything you can say about it right now?

| CD Wish we could....

OPM Do you think the *Tomb Raider* series lends itself to any sort of online play? Was anything like that considered for *Legend*?

| CD Very early on [in the design process,] online was considered and then dropped. We had our work cut out for us in just delivering a quality single-player experience. Part of the problem with multiplayer in the *Tomb Raider* universe is there aren't many characters you'd want to play besides Lara. That said, I wouldn't rule it out as a future possibility.

> "I WOULDN'T RULE OUT [ONLINE PLAY] AS A FUTURE POSSIBILITY."

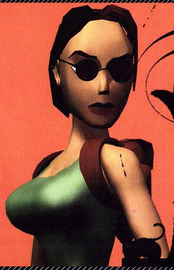
| OPM The story line of *Legend* re-creates the origins of Lara to a certain extent. Does that mean everything that happened in the first six games has been completely wiped away?

| CD Not at all. We chose to tell a story that didn't have much to do with the previous *Tomb Raider* stories, but we also tried not to trample what the previous stories had established. There are some backstory elements that have been carefully preserved as well. These elements are only touched on in *Legend*, but we're doing our best to create a cohesive universe for future stories that doesn't ignore the previous ones.

| OPM What was your favorite of the first six games? Did it have any major influence on *Legend*?

| CD Probably the second. It delivered the *Tomb Raider* experience better than the other five. The first and second games both had a major influence on *Legend*. They defined the spirit of what we set out to deliver: cutting-edge movement

RETRO CHIC



During our interview, we asked the guys at Crystal Dynamics if the rumored remake of the original *Tomb Raider* would come to pass. Although they dodged the question, we figured the project was inevitable, thanks to a video circulating the Web at the time with Core Design's name featured prominently (check it out at www.gamevideos.com). Soon after, though, Core Design announced that while the video was real, the project had been canned. But the very next day, Eidos announced that there *would* indeed be a 10th-anniversary remake of the original *Tomb Raider* for the PS2, PSP, and PC. But Crystal Dynamics will be the devs—not Core.

RÉSUMÉ

RILEY COOPER

Tomb Raider: Legend (PS2, 2006) – Lead Designer

Legacy of Kain: Defiance (PS2, 2003) – Lead Designer

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver 2 (PS2, 2001) – Lead Design

Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver (PS1, 1999) – Design, Layout

Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain (PS1, 1996) – Designer

Solar Eclipse (Sega Saturn, 1995) – Level Layout, Design

mechanics, spending the vast majority of the game in and around ancient spaces, large physical puzzles, and acrobatic combat.

OPM *Tomb Raider* practically became the poster child for how not to milk a series. Where do you feel the series went wrong originally? Was the pressure to produce a new sequel every year the main problem?
CD The pressure to produce a sequel a year is always an issue. Making any big game in that time frame is a challenge. Who knows what hurdles [Core Design] had to jump in making their games? All kinds of things happen in this industry. That said, from the outside, it looks like they spent too much time trying to evolve the "soft design"—story, characters, and locales—and not enough time on the "hard design"—controls, mechanics, and game systems. This resulted in Lara getting further and further from her element—tomb raiding—and left the gameplay almost exactly where it was when [the series] started.

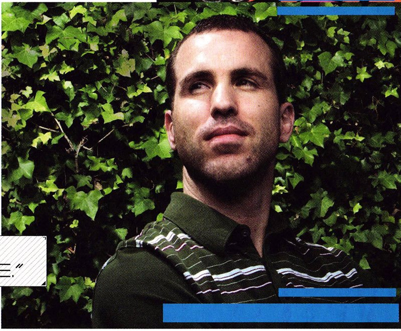
OPM How will you keep the same thing from happening with *Tomb Raider* this time around?

> "THE PRESSURE TO PRODUCE A SEQUEL A YEAR IS ALWAYS AN ISSUE."

CD We care a lot about story. We believe in it as a critical component of the experience and essential to developing Lara's character, but gameplay comes first. We'll not forget this.

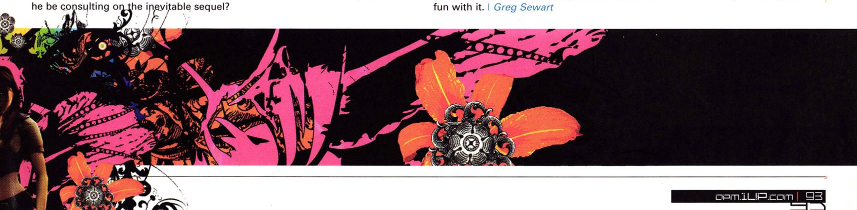
OPM Before *Tomb Raider* was handed to Crystal Dynamics, Core Design made a lot of noise about their future plans for Lara and her story following *Angel of Darkness*. Does Crystal Dynamics have any sort of overarching story line they've only just scratched with *Legend*?
CD We've put a fair bit of energy into the backstory. *Legend* was really about Lara, as any *Tomb Raider* game will be, but future games will deal more with this developing backstory to give fans a better sense of the larger forces at work in Lara's world.

OPM What kind of input did Lara's creator, Toby Gard, have on the project? Will he be consulting on the inevitable sequel?



CD It was great to have Toby on board in developing *Legend*. He's smart and friendly and obviously cares a lot about Lara. He did a lot of different things on *Legend*, including providing direction for cinematics, collaborating on story, and doing character concepts. He always had great feedback for those things he wasn't directly on the hook for as well. He'll definitely be tapped for contribution to future projects.

OPM And finally, we just have to ask whether you've had a chance to mess around with the PlayStation 3. What are your thoughts on the system?
CD We look forward to having three consoles out there to show our work on. Only our engineers have played with it thus far. We're sure they're having some fun with it. | *Greg Sewart*



Tae Ew witchdoctor
Janani
Coriss
Silkina

HANGING ON

EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES IS STILL RUNNING—BUT WHO'S PLAYING?

Back in the golden age of massively multiplayer online RPGs (aka the late 1990s), *EverQuest* publisher/developer Verant Interactive (now part of Sony Online Entertainment) ruled the genre with a +5 elven-chainmail fist. In February 2003, four years after the original PC-based *EQ*'s release, SOE attempted to cash in on the console crowd with *EverQuest Online Adventures* for the PS2, predicting a whopping 100,000 subscribers out of the gate. *EQOA* fell considerably short of those figures (topping out at roughly 50,000, according to MMO tracking site mmogchart.com) and received just one retail expansion—*EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers*—in November of that year. Skeptics might expect the game to have died a quiet death at some point since...yet three years later—and despite the spotty retail presence—people (approximately 30,000 of 'em, says mmogchart.com) *still* play *EQOA*.

It certainly isn't for lack of competition; Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XI* easily tops *EQOA*'s subscriber base by an estimated 1,600 percent, and anyone willing to look beyond the PS2 can obviously find a staggering selection of high-profile MMOs for the PC (*World of WarCraft*, anyone?). SOE, for its part, maintains that the game's quality keeps it afloat. "I can tell you that our community is a thriving, tight-knit bunch," says associate producer Leah "Sapphyra" Ruben. "We've got a fantastic track record of 'stickiness'—when people log in, they generally like what they see and stick around for a while. A few months ago, we ran a promotion that allowed all inactive accounts in good standing to log in for 30 days to give us a try. According to our reports, over half the people that logged in subscribed for at least a month after seeing how the game had changed and evolved since they'd logged in last. *EQOA* specifically shines as an engaging game you can play from your couch—something many of our players enjoy over PC games."

> "OUR COMMUNITY IS A THRIVING, TIGHT-KNIT BUNCH."

According to Ruben, *EQOA* also does OK for itself when it comes to attracting new customers—not the easiest feat in the world, considering the game's retail nonvisibility. "Word of mouth is key," Ruben explains. "People that get involved with the game like to tell their friends about it...and chances are, the average person is more likely to have a PS2 rather than a bleeding-edge PC. We have families, neighbors, and couples that play together. For maintaining our subscribers, we do what we do best: constantly update the game, try to make it just a little bit better each time, and keep in constant contact with our community."

COMMUNITY CHEST

SOE's community efforts include a weekly "In Development" report on the *EQOA* website, a monthly SOE podcast (the first one debuted in June and included an *EQOA* segment with Ruben), and a surprisingly active message board—where we put the big question to the players themselves: Why *do* people still play *EQOA*?

Forum user Saeadarra cuts straight to the chase: "My PC can almost-but-not-quite meet *World of WarCraft*'s specs, so that settled that for me. *EQOA* was the first online game I tried, and it was so easy to get into, easy to learn the controls, and the early levels were a stepping-stone for learning one's [character]." CMax, who plays *EQOA* with his family, takes this rationale a bit further: "We cannot afford three computers and the required upgrades. Having three PS2s fits the bill. Also, my wife does not care for games where many of the actions require a keyboard, and our son is not allowed on the computer with all that is going on today." CMax ends his post by affirming that "I've been playing *EQOA* since before the beginning and will keep playing until the end. If a sequel [comes] out for the PS3, my family and I will be there, too."

Several others cite the game as a great alternative to dealing with potentially expensive PC upgrades, while extolling *EQOA*'s uncomplicated gameplay and an active, friendly community—often in stark contrast to *Final Fantasy XI*'s grueling nature. "The community in *FFXI* was far from helpful," user Lando complains. "I roamed around for hours in a starting city begging people to help me. *EQOA* is way different—people will help you if you ask them to. They'll give you advice and maybe even help you get a coach or two." Fellow poster Youscareme backs up the community sentiment: "I, too, play this game mostly for the people. If it weren't for them, I would have been gone awhile ago."

PHAT LEWT: THE NEXT GENERATION?

But while many players sing the praises of *EQOA*'s affordability and kinship, some fear for the game's long-term life expectancy, especially with the PS3 looming on the horizon. Forum user Bravado says what's on everyone's mind: "Hopefully SOE [makes] another expansion for *EQOA*, whether for the PS2 or PS3. A lot of revenue and potential will be lost the day the servers shut down if SOE decides not to continue this game."

SOE's Ruben assures us that no one needs to panic. "The answer is that we're committed to updating and continuing development on the game," she pledges. "Our 'to-do' list is literally infinite. In terms of expanding the game beyond just updates, we've got some stuff on the drawing board." That may not be quite the confirmation that many players want—but it's better than nothing. | *Ryan Scott*

EVERQUEST ONLINE ADVENTURES AT A GLANCE

Neither *EverQuest Online Adventures* nor its lone expansion, *EverQuest Online Adventures: Frontiers*, managed to achieve quite the same level of distinction as their PC-based brethren. For those of you still completely in the dark about North America's first PS2-based MMORPG (and those who need a refresher), here are the basics:

Publisher Sony Online Entertainment

Developer Sony Online Entertainment

ESRB T

Original MSRP $39.99 (*EQOA*); $29.99 (*Frontiers*)

Launch Date February 11, 2003 (*EQOA*); November 17, 2003 (*Frontiers*)

Monthly Subscription Fee $12.99 (or $24.99 via SOE's all-inclusive Station Access)

Estimated Active Subscribers 30,000 as of May 2006 (source: mmogchart.com)

Website everquestonlineadventures.station.sony.com

Official Forums eqoa-forums.station.sony.com

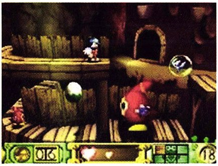
***OPM*'s Review Score** 2.5 out of 5 (*EQOA*); 3.5 out of 5 (*Frontiers*)

KLONOA

DOOR TO BRILLIANCE

Poor Klonoa. Just like the games he starred in, he never quite fit in.

Released in 1998, Namco's *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile* arrived right when 3D gaming started getting good. It appeared right as traditional side-scrolling platform action games were being written off as dead and buried (and good riddance, said the press). It showed up as gamers were starting to realize that maybe cuddly mascot characters weren't really necessary for a good game.



Needless to say, as a 2D platformer starring a fuzzy cat-thing, *Klonoa* was greeted with a resounding shrug of indifference when it hit American stores. Even those who gave the game a chance were mostly underwhelmed by all the cute critters and what appeared to be almost insultingly easy gameplay.

Poor gamers. They missed out on one of the finest 32-bit games ever created.

For those who saw the game through to its end, *Klonoa* offered a truly engrossing experience that belied its childlike aesthetic and simple play mechanics. In an era where DualShocks and the N64's three-pronged controllers required increasingly intricate hand contortions to perform the most basic of actions, *Klonoa*'s limited interface—the titular character jumped and grabbed/tossed enemies using only two buttons—was a welcome reminder of the satisfaction inherent in intuitive, pick-up-and-play gaming. His double-jump, enabled by using a captive enemy as a stepping-stone, was about as complex as the controls ever got.

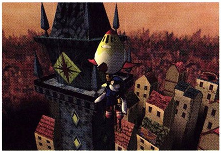
Yet the game was anything but a pushover—at about the halfway point, its challenge suddenly ramped up. Enemy placement became trickier, often requiring complex maneuvers to defeat foes. Level designs grew gradually more complex as well, packed with branching paths and puzzles that required devious applications of Klonoa's minimalist skill set.

And while the game never lost its saccharine cuteness—everyone spoke in an imaginary language of babbles, and Klonoa's companion Huepow was squeaky enough to make nearby dogs howl in agony—the story took a dark turn along the way. The villainous Ghadius shattered the idyllic world of Phantomile, and Klonoa himself suffered a heartbreaking loss. But most bittersweet of all was the hero's realization of his true place in the world. PlayStation gamers like to hold up Aerith's death in *Final Fantasy VII* as the most emotionally devastating scene they'd ever witnessed in a videogame, but it really had nothing on watching Klonoa and Huepow's happy ending take a bittersweet turn.

Klonoa's true sophistication came in the form of its graphics; rather than transpiring in a flat, two-dimensional world, the game action was rendered in polygons. It certainly wasn't the first game to adopt this style, but Namco gave this effort far more polish than the likes of *Clockwork Knight* and *Pandemonium!* Not only did the visual design allow for sweeping vistas and majestic boss encounters, it also gave the 2D action a hint of depth—Klonoa could sometimes move away from the camera via branching paths, or toss enemies at targets located in the foreground or background.

As a small bonus, *Klonoa* is one of the few games to genuinely benefit from the PlayStation 2's ability to smooth out textures in PS1 games—not only does the feature make the backgrounds look even crisper, it transforms the character sprites from confusing blobs into something resembling actual artwork. It's mysterious black magic, but it's definitely welcome.

While the game spawned several sequels, none of them have meshed together in quite the same way as the original. The portable puzzle spin-offs are challenging and entertaining, but they lack the visual splendor that the PS1's polygons offered. *Klonoa 2* for the PS2 helped pioneer cel-shaded graphical design, but it gets bogged down by far too much story and less imaginative level designs than its predecessor. And the import-only *Klonoa Beach Volleyball* for PS1 is like *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* for the *Sesame Street* set.



Klonoa is a unique gem, rivaled by a few games (*Tomba!*, for instance) but surpassed by none. It's a perfect combination of graphics, level design, story, and intuitive gameplay. And, like so many works of genius, it went sadly unappreciated in its time, both by the public and by much of the press.

Ultimately, though, what *Klonoa* most represents is Namco's special touch: the ability to create great games that made the company such an arcade powerhouse in the early '80s. Amidst the violence of its *Tekken*s and the realism of its *Ace Combat*s, *Klonoa* proves that Namco still values simplicity, charm, and—above all—good fun. By bucking trends and stepping boldly backward, *Klonoa* became a 32-bit classic...and a great game in any era. | *Jeremy Parish*

PS1-DERLAND

ACROSS THE DIMENSIONS

BY JEREMY PARISH

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

As a child of the NES era, I have an undeniable soft spot for platform games. You know, the run-and-jump affairs—collect 100 of this, strain to reach that out-of-the-way ledge, maybe grab a power-up somewhere along the way. RPGs, first-person shooters, and sandbox adventure games all have their place in this world, but when it gets down to the brass tacks, the heart of gaming is about hopping on your enemy's head...with gusto.

Maybe it's just my age catching up with me, but I definitely prefer platformers of a 2D nature. They tend to be much faster-paced, more intuitive, and—best of all—require far less wrestling with uncooperative camera controls. 3D platformers tend to be overdesigned and plodding, requiring a lot more effort for the same amount of leaping satisfaction.

Alas, wonderful as *Super Mario 64* was, it represented an extinction-level event for the 2D-platforming genre. Dinosaurs had their comet; 2D platformers had Bob-omb Battlefield. *Mario 64* became the standard. Gamers enjoyed that game—therefore, game creators reasoned, they'd enjoy other games just like it. Meanwhile, the neophiliacs in the media urged the swift death of anything that smacked of a mere *16* bits. Thanks for 10 years of good times, two-dimensional planes. It's been real, parallax scrolling. Don't call us, bit-map graphics—we'll call you.

MARIO 64 REPRESENTED AN EXTINCTION-LEVEL EVENT.

And we greeted the extra dimension with open arms. A decade of 2D platformers had given rise to a *lot* of bad ones. Usually, they sported a movie license or a furry mascot—or, in worst-case scenarios, both. Of course, it didn't take long to realize that this wasn't so much an issue with 2D gaming as it was an issue with gaming in general—where Mario leads, imitators follow.

But by then, it was too late. 2D gaming was all but dead. With our best David Byrne anguish, we asked ourselves, "My god! What have I done?"

Fortunately, certain clever developers had sorted out a way to enjoy the best of both worlds—2D games with the 3D graphics necessary to trick the PlayStation generation into playing them. *Clockwork Knight* on the Saturn was the first game to really pull it off, and Sega's *NiGHTS* took it in a dazzling aerial direction—but the *NiGHTS*-inspired *Klonoa* perfected it. The polygonal graphics allowed for majestic camera angles in both gameplay and cinemas, to say nothing of the spectacular boss battles. And all without sacrificing the tight gameplay and simple controls that were the hallmarks of the best classic games.

These "2.5D" games have experienced something of a resurgence in the past year or two, thanks to the rise of powerful handheld consoles. True 3D doesn't work too well on portables—turns out that judging depth is tough on a 3-inch screen—which is why Mega Man's PSP outings have featured 100-percent retro-classic gameplay, exact control, and the fully polygonal graphics necessary to trick the kids into thinking they're all newfangled.

Meanwhile, the 2.5D *New Super Mario Bros.* over on the DS has already sold 2.5 million copies worldwide, proving there's money to be made with this pseudoretro style of game...and making it likely that we'll be seeing quite a bit more of them. It seems that no matter the dimension, where Mario leads...well, you know the rest. |

PlayStation 5
PS5
PS5

JOE RYBICKI looks forward to playing all the hottest games of the future on his BrainStation, surgically implanted by the friendly doctors at the Sony labs. Want to share your own visions of the future? opm@ziffdavis.com.

IN MY DAY...

MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

Sharp-eyed readers will note that last month was the 10th anniversary of my first day here in Ziffalia. Things were different back then—very different. You damn kids with your music don't realize how good you've got it. When I started, not only was I working on a Macintosh IIsi (circa 1990 and lacking even a CD drive), I had to share it with another employee. We didn't even get e-mail until 1998.

All grumpy-old-manliness aside, this anniversary has got me thinking about the bad old days, how far we've come since then, and where we might be headed. So I thought I would share with you a few of my predictions for the next 10 years. In 2016...

...graphics will be so advanced that we won't even use them as a standard for judging games. As in the days when graphics consisted of one or two moving blocks, gameplay will be king.

...Sony Computer Entertainment president Ken Kutaragi will be hyping the PlayStation 5's ability to play games in the sixth dimension. No one will have any idea what he's talking about.

...we will look back and laugh at today's spinning-plastic-disc technology. Games will be downloaded directly to multiterabyte hard drives, or sold in stores on 100GB flash memory.

...there will no longer be a distinction between PC games and console games, because Microsoft (whose headquarters, incidentally, will grow to occupy the entire Pacific Northwest, eventually seceding from the U.S. and asserting its independence as the Republic of Gatesylvania) will have integrated Xbox game support into Windows. Speaking of the Xbox, I have two words for you: Xbox Ultra. Seriously, where do you go from "360"?

...UMD movies will still be dead.

...Sony's crack technicians will finally figure out a way to implement both rumble and motion-sensing in a single controller, just in time for the next big wave of novelty control systems: brainwaves.

...the designers of *Duke Nukem Forever* will have finished wall textures and will be moving on to floors.

...videogame consoles will cost as much as high-end televisions—but they will be hooked up to everything in your house. With the help of your PS5, you will be able to record TV shows, listen to music, surf the Internet, turn on your air conditioning, program your coffeemaker, open your garage door, start your car, shop for groceries, draw a bath, detect intruders in your home, get a totally bitchin' tan, travel through time...oh, and, uh, play games.

...an army of cybernetically enhanced clones of antigaming zealot Jack Thompson will stalk the streets at night, blasting down the doors of black-market adult-gaming dens and incinerating the scum within in a purifying fire of righteousness. Lacking the convenient target of videogames, parents will discover that the responsibility for raising their own children has, in fact, been theirs all along.

...and a new *GTA* will make someone angry. I'm pretty sure about that last one. I

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